
Report of the Corporate Parenting Panel

What is Corporate Parenting?

- 1 Everybody working with or representing the interests of children and young people in care is a corporate parent and should be aware of their responsibilities. All local authority staff, elected members and relevant partner agencies share this duty. In practical terms, being a corporate parent means advocating on behalf of these children and young people to ensure they get the support they need to achieve the best outcomes. Asking the straightforward question, "Would this be good enough for my child?" and challenging any poor practice are central to this role.

The work of the Corporate Parenting Panel

- 2 The Corporate Parenting Panel oversees the services provided to children and young people in care. It is an all-party group which provides advice and challenge to the Cabinet Members for Children and Young People and Education and Skills. Membership of the Panel is:

Andrew Baldwin
Joy Dennis
Dawn Hall
Morwen Millson (Chairman)
Chris Oxlade
Jacky Pendleton
Elizabeth Sparkes

What has the Panel been doing?

- 3 The Panel last reported to County Council in April 2018 and since that time has continued to focus on priority areas as outlined in its Work Programme, as well as continuing its work with the Children in Care Council and identifying new areas of work. The Panel is only obliged to report to County Council once per year, but it feels that more regular reporting is beneficial in order to raise the profile of corporate parenting.
- 4 **CLA Strategy and Action Plan** – The Panel has worked with officers to help develop the Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy and Action Plan, to which the Children in Care Council has also contributed. The Strategy and Action Plan was agreed by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People in March 2018. The Panel will continue to monitor the Action Plan at future meetings.
- 5 **Health Report** – Members welcomed Heather Lomas to the Panel, the new Designated Nurse for CLA. The Panel was updated on current health assessments, and areas which raised concern, such as timescales relating to those assessments. The Designated Nurse for CLA hopes to promote a more integrated model of working, resulting in a smoother and more efficient system that ultimately prioritises our own West Sussex children. This will include a mental health assessment for certain children depending on the

circumstances. Members also supported the call for a more sophisticated dashboard of health data

- 6 Care Leavers** – The Panel helped to develop a briefing for members of the County Council who also sit on their local district/borough council. The briefing sets out how district and borough council colleagues can support care leavers in their area, for example in terms of housing or leisure facilities.
- 7 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)** – The Panel received a report on this in September which detailed work that the Council is undertaking in this area. The Panel raised concern that, although the health needs of UASC are being met, Initial Health Assessments are taking too long. Members asked for the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People to approach local MPs to highlight a need for extra funding for this work.
- 8 Advocacy Service** – Members received the Advocacy Service Annual Report. It highlighted that all children are offered the use of an advocate at their first review meeting for as long as they want it; older children can choose not to have an advocate (however, few choose not to have one). Children can give feedback verbally or online and are generally satisfied with the advocacy they receive. An update will be provided at an earlier point in 2019.
- 9 Virtual School** – The Panel considered data relating to results, attendance and exclusion. Members noted that fixed-term exclusions have declined and there are no permanent exclusions. The report also highlighted that, although absence rates seemed high for the alternative provision college, they were 15% lower than the previous year. Members were concerned the data demonstrated that CLA children are not achieving as well as other non-CLA nationally. They did, however, understand that that the journey of a CLA has a significant impact upon their education and that this should be considered when looking at the data.
- 10 Children’s Residential Homes** – Members received an update on children’s residential homes in West Sussex. The Panel and the Children and Young People’s Services Select Committee have helped to identify key issues around facilities management and specific budgets in order to ensure increased performance and outcomes for this area. This is now a standing item on the Corporate Parenting Panel agenda until further notice in order to ensure that progress continues.
- 11 Adoption and Fostering Annual Reports** – The Panel received the Adoption and Fostering Annual Reports. The Panel heard directly from two couples (one who had recently adopted, and one who had been fostering for some time). Both couples had been happy with the support they received from the County Council. The service is developing a targeted campaign to try to increase the number of people coming forward to apply to become foster carers or to adopt.
- 12 Independent Visitor Scheme Annual Report** – The Panel considered the annual report of the Independent Visitor (IV) Scheme. The Annual Report provides an overview of the Independent Visitor Scheme 2017/18 and the number of IVs recruited and matched with children.

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- 13 Independent Reviewing Officer Service** – The Panel considered the annual report of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service. The role of the IROs is two-fold: chairing the child’s review, and monitoring the child’s case on an ongoing basis including whether any safeguarding issues arise. Members noted that it has been very beneficial for the IRO service to move to the Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement service area. The move has refreshed the team and there is a robust system of duty.
- 14 Children in Care Council** – Members of the Panel have continued to meet with the Children in Care Council, most recently in October 2018.
- 15 Epic Awards** – West Sussex Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum will hold the annual seventh EPIC Award Ceremony to celebrate the achievement of West Sussex Children Looked After and Care Leavers on Sunday, 9 December at Butlins, Bognor Regis.
- 16 Advent Calendars** – The Panel would like to thank all those officers and members of the County Council who contributed to the donation of advent calendars for our children in care and care leavers. The target for 800 advent calendars was exceeded.
- 17 Youth Offending Service** – The Panel considered a report that provided an update on the performance and practice of the Youth Offending Service in relation to CLA. This included current performance data, current working practices and information regarding the future development of practice within the YOS in relation Children Looked After.

Future Plans

- 18** The Panel will be considering the following in the coming months:
- Further meetings with the Children in Care Council
 - Performance Data
 - Virtual School update
 - Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET)
 - Voice of the child

Recommended

That the report be noted.

Morwen Millson

Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel

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Background Papers: None