

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2022/23

To:	Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee
Meeting Date:	15 November 2023
From:	Service Director, Corporate Parenting
Electoral division(s):	All
Key decision:	No
Outcome:	Provide a summary of information shared at with the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee in 2022/23, including a review of key performance information.
Recommendation:	The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee is recommended to: a) Agree the report and areas of development listed for Corporate Parenting in 2023/24

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1. Background

- 1.1 The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee for Cambridgeshire has been in existence since 2017. It is a well-established Sub-Committee and is regularly attended by Council Members, Council Officers and representatives from Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association. In that time, it has developed and changed into its current formulation of a thematic approach to key areas of activity. These are: placements and care planning; health and education of children in care; and those that have had a care experience.
- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to provide the Children and Young People Committee with an overview of the work carried out by the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee 2022-23. The report addresses the terms of reference of the Sub-Committee over the last 12 months and the impact the Sub-Committee has had in delivering on its objectives.
- 1.3 The meeting format changed in 2021 to thematic and has worked well in enabling Council Members to focus on key areas of Council and partnership activity in more depth, offering scrutiny and challenge to Council Officers. The Sub-Committee is ambitious in its aspirations for Children in Care and Care Leavers and supports the needs and aspirations through a more in-depth review of three key themes. These are Education, Health and Placements. The meetings rotate to ensure all subject matters are reviewed regularly.
- 1.4 In the past year, Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council have separated. This has not affected the running of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee, or its focus which continues to be the children and young people of Cambridgeshire, their families and their carers.
- 1.5 Reporting Mechanism and Work Programme – The Sub-Committee has three informal and three formal meetings per year. The purpose of these are to enable children and young people to attend the informal meetings without the intrusion of this being a public meeting. The three informal meetings enable children who are in care and those that have left care to jointly chair the meeting alongside the Sub-Committee Chair. In doing so the Sub-Committee takes a strong interest in understanding those who have experience of being in care and those who have left care, their views of the service and how best to improve it. The formal meetings include the voice of Foster Carers who are recruited by Cambridgeshire Fostering Service. Their voice and views have enabled the Sub-Committee to understand more fully their aspirations for Children and Young People along with feedback on the service. At each meeting, monthly performance data called the Scorecard (attached as Appendix) is reviewed by the Sub-Committee. This enables Members to scrutinise in more depth any issues related to the performance of the Council in its responsibilities to promote and be aspirational in its outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers. The Chair remains as Councillor Anna Bradnam and Vice Chair Councillor Michael Atkins. Links exist to Participation and Promoting the Views of Children with Care Experience. The Sub-Committee listens directly to the views and feedback from Children and Young People relating to their experiences. Children and Young People

share their achievements with Council Members along with how they are influencing the delivery of services for Children in Care.

2. Main Issues

2.1 Summary of reports reviewed by Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee 2022/23

- 2.1.1 A dip sample of Review Health Assessments – The overall quality of the cases reviewed was found to be good, and in all cases the Health Action Plans and Leaving Care Health Assessment/Passport felt personal to the individual child/young person. There were improvements in performance compared to the previous year's audit, including the number Review Health Assessments (RHAs) completed face to face, birth and family history available, and completion of growth measurement. It identified that ongoing partnership work is required to enable improvements around accessing routine dental care and improving the number of strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs) completed by foster carers and returned to the Children in Care Health Team so that they are available at the health assessment. This work is supported by the Children in Care Health Team Lead Nurse, who is pivotal to supporting the recommendations of the audit.
- 2.1.2 The process and some audits of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire used by the health service during their Health Assessments, and by education and children's social care – if the scores are elevated, they are discussed at the personal education plan (PEP) and at the Children in Care review.
- 2.1.3 The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service in the previous year – there were 592 children in care that year. The IRO service held 1,655 Child In Care Reviews during the year, and timeliness of these reviews remained excellent. Children and families' feedback reflected positively the IROs use of their skills to amplify the voice of the child in Care Planning. IROs use of the Escalation Protocol remains fully embedded across the service and evidences the IROs oversight of care planning for children.
- 2.1.4 The Siblings Together Forever Project – brings together siblings who have been separated through care for a short residential multi-activity trip at Grafham Water.
- 2.1.5 The work of the Participation Team in the previous year – whose role is to promote the voice of children and young people in care by offering a variety of opportunities for engagement and feedback, and ensuring action is taken as a result of that feedback. They offered a summer participation programme; an art challenge; children in care committee; meeting with corporate parents. They attend interviews and support recruitment of a range of roles and undertake "youth inspections" of some services in the county.
- 2.1.6 The Care Leaver Forum (CLF) presented their project – a performance-based project to give young people in care the opportunity to build confidence and

skills in this area, by the end of the summer. Care Leavers designed and facilitated a workshop at the Virtual School Conference in late June.

- 2.1.7 Virtual School Annual Report – their role encompasses supporting children in to the best possible school at transition point; offering advice support and training and trauma responsive approaches in schools; the Virtual School employ a PEP Champion who provides training and support to social workers and designated teachers; used Pupil Premium to promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best educational outcomes for children in care; worked to develop positive working relationships with Multi Academy Trusts; attendance continued to be impacted by Covid-19 but was being closely monitored; no children were permanently excluded; and the children’s educational attendance and achievements were summarised.
- 2.1.8 Regional Adoption Agency Report 2021/2 – Cambridgeshire and Peterborough matched 58 children, placed 65 children and supported 69 children to be adopted. 40 prospective adoptive assessments were commenced, and 42 adopters were approved.
- 2.1.9 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Adoption and Permanence Panel Report – in 2021/22, 44 mainstream adoption approvals and 6 early permanence dual approvals were achieved. The overall quality of adoptions reports is good. The quality of Child Permanence Reports continued to vary but Panel noted that there had been an improvement over the year. Areas for development included making sure that CPRs included a clear narrative of the child’s journey; consistent inclusion of parents’ views and post adoption contact plans; in particular, contact with siblings and Social Workers progressing actions recommended from panel.
- 2.1.10 Children in Care/Care Leavers in Education, Employment and Training (EET) Promotion Action Plan Update – the DfE figure for 19 to 21-year-old care leavers in EET was 49% for 2021, with an East of England average of 52%. There was an improvement in performance of 5% from 2020. A range of activities are undertaken to promote Education, Employment and Training for Care Leavers.
- 2.1.11 The report of the Cambridgeshire Fostering Service and Cambridgeshire Foster Care Association – The Cambridgeshire Foster Care Association (CFCA) meet regularly and gather the views and experiences of foster carers. The Chair and Vice Chair meet with the Head of Service for Fostering regularly. They have established a Fostering Recruitment Ambassador to support recruitment activities for foster carers. There had been work to develop their Mentoring Scheme to support all new foster carers. Support Groups for carers were running face to face. They have developed a Feedback Loop system with the Fostering Service to create forums to hear feedback from the foster carers. There had been work about setting up Junior ISAs and Trust Fund accounts.
- 2.1.12 As of March 2023, there were 163 registered foster carers to Cambridgeshire County Council.

2.1.13 Health Report – 23 of 88 Initial Health Assessments (26%) were completed in timescales (within 20 days of becoming accommodated) for in County Placements and 4 of 79 Initial Health Assessments (5%) were completed in timescales for out of county placements. The cause of the delay was delayed consent and referral forms from children’s social care, and carers, and children not being able to attend the initial appointment offered to them. For children out of county, capacity to complete the appointments will have had an impact. There is a designated nurse to support in developing practice in this area. For Review Health Assessments, these are completed in the child or young person’s home with a specialist nurse and for children placed in county 231 out of 248 assessments were completed in time (93%). Children and young people were clear that they prefer an in-person appointment. Strength and Difficulty Questionnaires (SDQs) are completed as part of the health assessment process. For children in care living in Cambridgeshire who experience a mental health difficulty, they can be referred by a professional to YOUNited which is a range of mental health services. Post covid, supporting children to register with the dentist is really challenging.

2.2 Key practice areas

2.2.1 Statistics about Children in Care

There were 646 children in care at the end of March 2023, which is an increase of 14 from March 2022. 86 of them are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. The increase in children in our care is partly due to Cambridgeshire County Council accommodating more Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children from 8% of our looked after children population in 2021/22 to 13.3% in 2022/23.

2.3 Statutory Visits

In 2022/23, 78% of our visits to children in care took place at the statutory timescale of every 6 weeks (or at 8 or 12 weeks for children who have been looked after for more than a year and where the IRO has agreed this). Our service ambition for 2024/25 will be to aim for at least 90% of visits taking place every 6 months.

2.3.1 Placement Stability

- a) Progress has been made in relation to key performance areas that we have to report to the government in our annual returns with regard to placement stability for children in our care.
- b) The first measure is focused on short term placement stability and considers children who have experienced three or more placements (so two or more moves) in the past year. Last year, 51 (7.9%) of our children experienced three or more placements. This is lower than the national average of 10% of children in care experiencing three or more placement moves.

- c) The second measure is long term placement stability and relates to children who have been in our care for more than 2.5 years and have been in the same placement for at least 2 years. Last year, 162 out of 233 children (69.5%) achieved long term placement stability. This is in line with the national average of 71% of children achieving long term placement stability.

2.3.2 Placement Sufficiency

Placement sufficiency continues to be a local and national challenge. This has resulted in some children in our care in 2022/23 being in unsuitable placements, including placements that are not regulated by Ofsted; children aged under 12 being in residential placements; and children and young people experiencing a high number of placement moves. Our placements service are leading on a placement sufficiency strategy that includes a focus on placements within Cambridgeshire, appropriate commissioning of residential placements, and a housing pathway that supports our 16- and 17-year-olds to develop independent living skills.

2.4 Areas for development

The Corporate Parenting Service in Cambridgeshire has been through a significant amount of change in the last year, with the decoupling from Peterborough City Council and a number of changes in senior leadership. This has impacted on the functioning of the service and the new Interim Director for Corporate Parenting has been leading on improvement plan work across the service.

Key areas of focus and development that have been identified are:

- 2.4.1 Caseloads are currently very high with an average of 20 children per Social Worker (excluding newly qualified Social Workers). To allow best practice for the children in our care we would hope to have a maximum of 15 children per Social Worker as this would allow them to have the time and capacity to undertake more in-depth direct work and life story work.
- 2.4.2 We have an increasing number of Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) across all of children's services. Our UASC children and young people require very particular interventions including the potential need for age assessments, support around their asylum claims, support in relation to the trauma they have experienced in their home country and their journey to the UK. Consideration is being given as to whether a UASC specialist team needs to be created in order to develop a specialist team in the Corporate Parenting service which can develop best practice for these children and young people.
- 2.4.3 Permanency planning is an area of weakness in the service, particularly for children and young people where the plan is long term foster care. There is a

plan to review Permanence Planning across the whole of Children's Services and develop an agreed strategy in this area.

2.4.4 Placement stability is an area of concern – work is being undertaken to build in early identification of placements at risk, so that support can be put in at the earliest possible point.

2.4.5 Children on care orders placed with parents or with family and friends' carers – a review of all of these arrangements will take place in the upcoming year.

2.5 Children Leaving Care

2.5.1 Care Leavers on their 17th and 18th Birthday:

	21/22	22/23	Difference
LA In-Touch	94%	87.8%	- 6.2%
Engaged in EET	74%	57.1%	- 16.9%
Living in Suitable Accommodation	92%	83.3%	- 8.7%

2.5.2 Care Leavers on their 19th - 21st Birthday:

	21/22	22/23	Difference
LA In-Touch	91%	91.9%	+ 0.9%
Engaged in EET	54%	55.1%	+ 1.1%
Living in Suitable Accommodation	86%	86.9%	+ 0.9%

**Cambridgeshire SSDA903 Looked After Children Summary 22-23 (SN and regional data is not yet published for comparison)*

2.6 Key Strengths and Progress

There has been significant improvement in the Leaving Care Service over the last 12 months focusing on recruitment and retention. By 30 October 2023 there are no vacancies within teams (previously 29% vacancy rate) supporting stability in the service, and a shared understanding and work towards achieving the improvements that need to be made to ensure improved outcomes for our young people. Example includes securing further DfE Rough Sleeper funding for the dedicated Homeless Prevention Personal Adviser Role.

2.6.1 Other developments and impact:

- a) Reconnecting with care leavers we had lost touch with; efforts have been made (and continue) developing purposeful relationships. This is reflected in caseloads largely remaining unchanged (current 27.1/ full time equivalent (FTE), 6 months ago 27.9/FTE).
- b) Improved and launched our Staying Put offer (Sept 23) broadening post 18 accommodation options.
- c) Strengthened our Higher Education Offer to ensure an equitable offer to young people.
- d) Developed the business case to support an uplift in the care leaver Local Offer, reducing social inequalities.

- e) Talking Therapies via Stop Breathe Think (12-month initiative) providing direct access to counselling services with no wait list.
- f) Progressed Mentor Programme for care leavers aged 18+.
- g) Developed Education, Employment and Training Empowerment Forum to bring practitioners together with partners who can support EET planning from 16-25 years.
- h) Strengthening quality in Pathway Planning with a bespoke annual training schedule for Leaving Care, including Pathway Planning, Housing for Young People, Mental Capacity Act, understanding benefits to ensure a consistent approach in how we support our young people and baseline knowledge and skills across the Leaving Care workforce.
- i) Joint Housing Protocol to provide clear guidance and framework for practitioners and key partner agencies with a working group to inform future developments (to be approved at Departmental Management Team).
- j) Improving systems and processes to support day to day practice, including reporting on young people aged 21-25 years closed to service but whom we need to offer annual in-touch.
- k) Management oversight and working restoratively with teams to improve our in-touch and quality of relationships. In addition to the SSDA903 data, weekly performance clinics take place and routine case discussions to review all young people we are not in touch with, live in unsuitable accommodation and are NEET, to explore how we can adjust our practice to improve outcomes. As an example, in April 2023 we were in-touch (face to face) with 58.8% of our young people aged 16-25 years (all eligibilities), by October 2023 this has increased to 76.7%. In the same period 70.9% of young people aged 16-25 years (all eligibilities) were living in suitable accommodation, by October 2023 this has increased to 92.4%.

2.6.2 Areas we are developing:

- a) Review of our establishment to ensure care leavers have the right support at the right time giving space to develop caring and meaningful relationships.
- b) Promoting voice and influence, complimenting the work undertaken by the Participation Teams, we are undertaking our own consultation with key groups amongst our care leavers to ensure our improvement plan aligns with the experience of our young people; this includes parents and parents to be, young people in custody, and our separated migrant young people.
- c) Developing 'Welcome to Leaving Care' frequent event for young people and their carers.
- d) Adjusting the Pathway Plan and review format to improve experience and quality.
- e) Quality Assurance and in-house dip-sampling alongside monthly management audits.

- f) Monthly Team Manager led Pathway Plan review meetings to support and upskill practitioners.
- g) Improving pathways into Adult Services.
- h) Expanding Housing Options and support post 18 years.

2.6.3 Recommendations:

<i>Area to address</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Who by</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
We do not have a Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2022-25	Corporate Parenting Strategy to be written and encompass Children in Care, Children Leaving Care, and Fostering, Special Guardianships and Adoption.	Brian Relph, Executive Director, supported by Catherine Isaacs, Head of Corporate Parenting	To be presented at the next Corporate Parenting Board
Unaccompanied and Separated children (UASC) are currently receiving support across the whole of children's services and the offer can be inconsistent.	Review of our offer to our UASC and whether the service would benefit from the creation of a specialist UASC team.	Brian Relph, supported by Catherine Isaacs and Louisa Kay (Service Manager, Leaving Care Service)	Within 3 months
We do not have an up to date leaving care offer.	Review Leaving Care Offer so that we have a clear formal offer for young people aged 16+.	Catherine Isaacs and Louisa Kay	Within 2 months
Our performance for initial and review health assessments is poor in terms of completing them on time.	Review of current system involving Corporate Parenting and Health to take place.	Catherine Isaacs and Health colleagues	Within 2 months
Permanency planning for children in our care can be weak, particularly for children where the plan is long term foster care.	There is a review of Permanence Planning taking place across all of Children's Services. This should lead to Permanence Protocol for the whole of Children's Services.	Heads of Service across Children's Services	Within 3 months.

Many of our children and young people have increasingly complex mental health needs, and this impacts on all aspects of their lives.	We have an excellent clinical team that are able to offer a varied range of consultations and interventions. The clinical team to be clear about what their offer is to children, young people, their carers, their families and their Social Workers.	Vanessa Kinsey-Thatcher, Clinical Lead for Corporate Parenting.	Within 2 months
Our ability to recruit and retain good quality Social Workers is challenging in Cambridgeshire Children in Care Service.	There will be a Children's Service wide review of pay and conditions that the Children in Care service will feed into.	Martin Purbeck Executive Direction and Tapiwa Julius, Principle Social Worker	Within 3 months
There are not always timely, child-based assessments for children in our care.	A review of guidance about when assessments should be completed, and which assessments are needed will be undertaken. The aim is for there to be agreed policies across Children's Services for guidance about when assessments will be done.	Catherine Isaacs	Within 3 months

3. Alignment with the Council's ambitions

- 3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes

There are no significant implications for this priority.

- 3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.3 Health inequalities are reduced

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs

The recommendations outlined in this report should support the development of practice for children in our care and leaving our care to meet this priority.

3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality

The recommendations outlined in this report should support the development of practice for children in our care and leaving our care to meet this priority.

3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised

The recommendations outlined in this report should support the development of practice for children in our care and leaving our care to meet this priority.

3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive

The recommendations outlined in this report should support the development of practice for children in our care and leaving our care to meet this priority.

4. Significant Implications

Not applicable

5. Source documents

5.1 None