

Cambridgeshire County Council

Corporate Parenting

Sub-Committee

Annual Report



Corporate parenting is founded on the principle that the Local Authority, collectively with other relevant services, should have the same aspirations and provide the same kind of care that any good parent would provide for their own children

Foreword by Councillor Bradnam, Chair of the Cambridgeshire Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Hello and welcome

This year has been busy for the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee. The report reviews the achievements of the subcommittee over the last 12 months, demonstrating its value and impact given its unique function within the council. In the past the subcommittee has had council members who were care experienced. This is not the case at present but the subcommittee would welcome representation from young people in care.

This year has seen an easing of the COVID restrictions and a return a more normal working arrangements for the subcommittee. This has meant face to face meetings have returned between the subcommittee young people and council officers.

On reflecting on those achievements, I am mindful of the subcommittee's uniqueness in relation to its structure and format. The subcommittee co-chairs its agenda with young people. In doing so the subcommittee listens to the feedback directly from those using council services in a way that is powerful and humbling at the same time. Over the year I have had the wonderful opportunity to see young people grow in confidence but also feedback to us on a range of topics that are meaningful to them.

The subcommittee also has representatives from the Cambridgeshire Fostering Association. Direct feedback from this important group of caring individuals has enriched the subcommittee's understanding of the challenges facing them and their achievements. The subcommittee has routine attendance from council officers.

The three-dimensional approach of having direct feedback from those that use the service in a variety of ways makes this subcommittee, in my view, unique and dynamic. The value of the subcommittee comes from this through promoting accountability from that direct and sometimes challenging lived experiences of those using the services.

Over the last year the subcommittee has had presentations from partners such as education and health on key areas of interest. These have demonstrated a wider collaborative approach across services to improve outcomes for children.

The subcommittee offers a 'golden thread' through being aligned with the internal processes of the council. The subcommittee is supported by the Corporate Parenting Partnership board whose function is to ensure partners are collectively delivering on the objectives from the subcommittee and the objectives of their respective areas.

Introduction

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, representatives from the foster carer Association, Children in Care and Care Leavers. 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.

The Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel with an overview of the work carried out by the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee 2021-2022.

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.

Background

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.

Reporting Mechanism and Work Programme

The Sub-Committee has three informal and three formal meetings per year. The purpose of which is 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 has a robust understanding of how 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 Council Members. This enables Council 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 Philippa Slatter.

Links 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. This year the Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Forum have reviewed and updated the 'Our Promise to Children and Young People in Care'. This key pledge was launched in June 2022. The CIC Council has produced their own personal goodbye cards for Social Workers to use. They have produced 2 You Tube Videos, one for Foster Carers and the other for Social Workers related to the type of skills children feel they need. These were viewed by Council Members and have been shared across Children's Services. They have designed and commissioned welcome packs, age appropriate,

for other children who come into care so that they feel welcome and understand more fully what is happening to them. They also commissioned luggage to enable them to move placements with dignity. The children in care council is now beginning a programme of inspection across key areas of the service, providing a report and action plan on their expectations where improvements are required. This will become a feature going forward.

Outcomes from Corporate Parenting Committee

- Reviewed the strengths and Difficulties questionnaire used by Health, education and children's social care to ensure it works seamlessly and promotes appropriate resource allocation for children in care.
- Wrote to NHS England advocating on behalf of Children in care about the lack of available dentists in Cambridgeshire. This resulted in Health improving their offer to children in care, through clear pathways for foster carers and placements to access.
- Provided scrutiny on placements out of area to lead officers
- Provided scrutiny and constructive feedback on placement stability.
- Provided scrutiny and monitoring of key areas of performance including statutory visiting
- Provided scrutiny and monitoring of the fostering service and the support to foster carers over all, including improving the fostering allowances.
- Worked collaboratively with the CIC council and the care leavers forum on promoting 'goodbye cards' when a SW end their involvement with children.
- Worked collaboratively with the CIC council and care leavers forum to produce personalised bags for children when leaving their placement.
- Supported the 'Young inspectors inspection of the supervised contact centres.

Foster Carers

Representatives from the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association have been an integral part of the subcommittee this year and their valuable contributions have meant the subcommittee has had a more nuanced understanding of their skills, challenges facing them and the support they need to undertake their role. This year the subcommittee drove the review of the foster carer allowances with a successful conclusion for the this committed group.

The National context

The Independent (Care) Review

The Independent Care Review was published in June 2022. It is anticipated this will have significant impact in the operational delivery of services for children who are experiencing care and those that have experienced care. The government response to this is expected in the Autumn. The main points for Corporate Parenting are outlined below.

The review proposes the creation of regional care cooperatives, which would have regional sufficiency duty but would ultimately become responsible for all fostering, adoption and residential services within a defined region yet to be determined. The review envisages that key stakeholders such as Health, the youth offending justice system, would align with the regional care co-operatives to offer a rounded service. There would also be a national foster carer recruitment campaign and an expectation that areas adopt an extended foster carer support model. The review proposes closing all secure training centres and create more local secure units to meet the needs of these young people.

For those children who have had experience of the care system the review proposes a refreshed Care Leaver Covenant with statutory protections up to the age of 25. It focuses on offering lifelong links programmes to care leavers, new powers around housing and homelessness and enhancement to the leaving care grant. The review proposes staying put and supported lodgings should be

extended to 23 and the virtual school should provide services until 25. There would be the offer of extended apprenticeships, and a renewed focus on the physical and mental health of care leavers.

Meeting the Educational Needs of Children in Care

In the last 12 months the Sub-Committee has had a keen focus on Children in Care's education within the period of restrictions linked to COVID and the subsequent easing of these. In this period, schools have moved from being predominately virtual to face to face lessons. Children in Care were given priority status to attend school and this occurred. Education and Children's Services worked closely together to support children's learning through their personal education plans ensuring this group of vulnerable children did not fall behind academically in this period.

There has been a keen focus on children's emotional well being in this period and the Sub-Committee focused further attention to the strengths and difficulties questionnaire which is used as an assessment tool when a child comes into care to understand their emotional needs. The Sub-Committee has supported the collaboration across the partnership between Health, Education, and Children's Social Care in developing a seamless process of how services work to review the information to improve outcomes for children. This has included supporting the request from Foster Carers to have additional training in this area.

Meeting the Health Needs of Children in Care

The overall health of children in care has been a focus for the Sub-Committee with a special focus on initial health assessments and the lack of access to routine dental treatment during COVID. The Sub-committee supported the review of the process between Health and Children's Social Care through its scrutiny of the data. The impact has seen an improvement in this area. A significant concern for the Sub-Committee has been the lack of access for Children and Young People regarding dentists. The Sub-Committee was not satisfied with the alternative arrangements and collectively wrote to NHS England expressing concern and a solution to the problem. This approach and the subsequent accountability approach of the Sub-Committee has supported a significantly improved offer for Children in Care placed within Cambridgeshire.

Meeting the Needs of Children in Care and their Placements

The stability of placements has been a focus for Council Members within the context of COVID and post this period. Council Members routinely scrutinise performance data asking and requesting information about how Council Officers are supporting children to remain in their placements. Over the last year the Sub-Committee has acknowledged the requests made by Foster Carers to make further adjustments to further improve the offer the Council makes to them and the Children and Young People they care for.

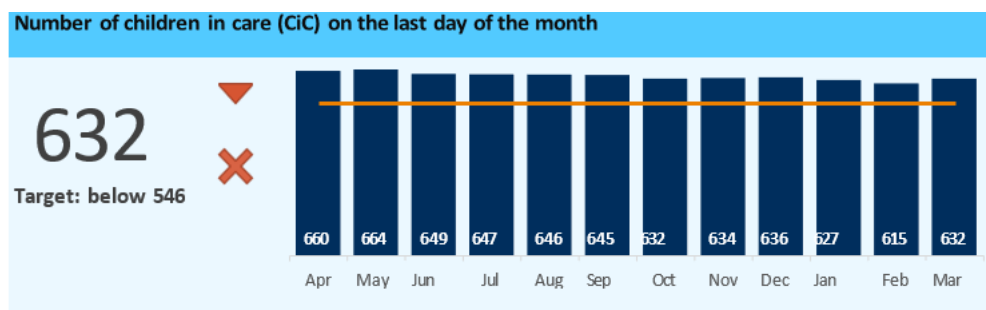
The last twelve months has seen a significant shift in the external placement market. This has been within a context of COVID whereby placement choice reduced. This has had an impact on the ability for placements and children to be a good match, with the continued challenge of placements being outside of Cambridgeshire. Work is ongoing with partners such as Commissioning and Education to ensure the wider needs of children and particularly those with Education, Health and Care Plans are considered when matching a child to a placement.

Children in Care Population

Power BI is now the standard reporting tool across Children's Services, and it is possible to monitor all current activity very effectively. The development of a static report (Dashboard) is now in place and a specific Corporate Parenting report developed.

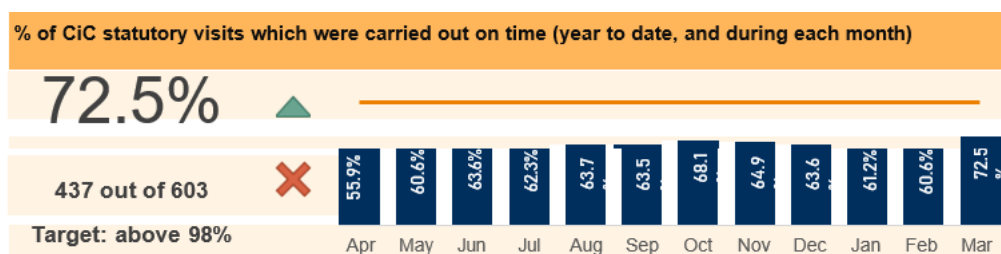
Numbers of Children in Care

The number of children in care at the end of March was 632 and this was a reduction of just under 30 children from the previous year. The subcommittee has monitored this regularly throughout the year. The reason for the reduction is linked to the introduction of the family safeguarding model. The reunification team has also enabled children to return home safely and sustainably in the last year.



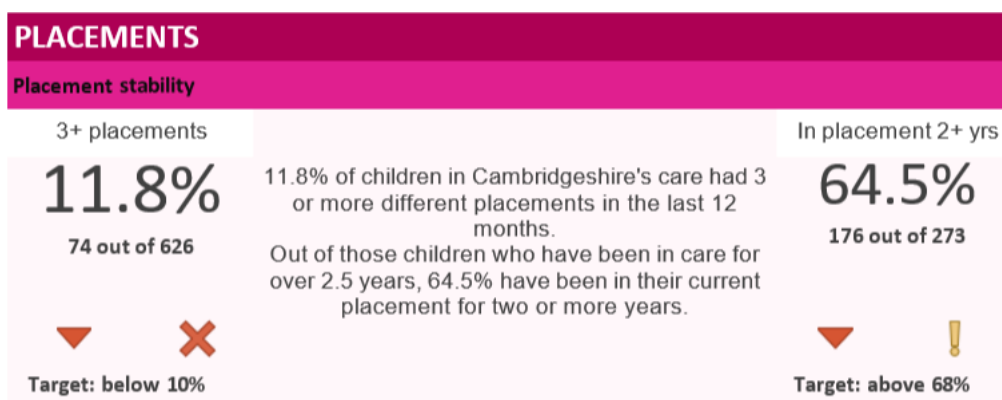
Statutory visits

These have been monitored throughout the year. Internal audit, dip sampling of case files has shown children are being seen within their placements routinely but that there has been a training issue within the service related to recording. Therefore, the performance data is showing a lower record of stat visits having occurred currently. This is an improving picture from the end of March at 72.5% to 78.6%.



Placement stability

At the end of March children who had had 3+ placement moves in 12 months was 11.8%. This data includes positive, planned and unplanned moves for children in this period. When compared with statistical neighbour's Cambridgeshire is only 0.8% lower. However, the national picture is 9%. For children who have been in their placement 2.5 years or more this was 64.5% at the end of March. However, when compared with statistical neighbours (67%) the region (70%) and the national picture (70%) we are showing as an outlier at this time.



Placement Sufficiency

This remains a challenge in 2021-2022, with demand outstripping supply nationally, regionally and locally. The work to stabilise placements to prevent placement breakdowns has been critical in managing the market. However, there has been an increase in children entering residential provisions in the last year, some of which traditionally would have a foster placement offer but within the current climate there isn't this option.

Children entering the care system are entering with more complex issues particularly those that are older teenagers. As a result, placement packages have increased significantly.

In an authority like Cambridgeshire that has worked hard to maintain children and young people at home wherever this is in their best interests and that has a low number of children in care as a result, it follows that a higher proportion of those children and young people will have more challenging and complex care needs. This has created challenges for our Fostering Service in terms of trying to meet the needs of these children and has led to more placements out of area and at higher tariffs.

The Sufficiency strategy 2021-2024 is supporting the investment in locally based placements. This is routinely monitored and scrutinised by the Corporate Parenting committee.

