

<b>CHILDREN &amp; EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	AGENDA ITEM No. 7
<b>20 JANUARY 2022</b>	<b>PUBLIC REPORT</b>

Report of:	Cllr Ray Bisby, Corporate Parenting Committee Chairman,	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Cllr Lynne Ayres Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education, Skills, and the University	
Contact Officer(s):	Nicola Curley Assistant Director Children’s Services	Tel. 864065

**REPORT ON WORK OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE 2020-21**

RECOMMENDATIONS	
<b>FROM:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee Chairman	<b>Deadline date:</b> N/A
<p>It is recommended that the Children and Education Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Note the work of the Corporate Parenting Committee during the 2020/21 municipal year, and</li> <li>2. Comment on the very positive contribution made by the Children in Care Council and care leavers through the care leaver drop-in, and;</li> <li>3. Note the ways in which children and young people in care and care leavers have continued to be supported by our services throughout the pandemic.</li> </ol>	

**1. ORIGIN OF REPORT**

1.1 This report is submitted to the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee and summarises the work of the Corporate Parenting Committee in the 2020-21 municipal year. The content of this report has been agreed by the Corporate Parenting Committee.

**2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT**

2.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee of activity carried out by the Corporate Parenting Committee in the municipal year 2020-2021

2.2 This report is for the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference Part 3, Section 4 - Overview and Scrutiny Functions, paragraph No. 2.1 Functions determined by Council:

- Children’s Services including
- a) Social Care of Children;
  - b) Safeguarding; and
  - c) Children’s Health.

2.3 This report addresses all areas of the Children in Care pledge and the Care Leavers’ Charter. It specifically demonstrates to Scrutiny how the Committee has been supporting our children and young people in care through the continuing pandemic, and Children in Care and Care Leavers’ education and training needs.

2.4 This report links to all of the corporate priorities.

- 2.5 This report is directly relevant to the Children in Care Pledge and summarises how Members meet corporate parenting responsibilities to promote positive outcomes for our children and young people in care.

### 3. **TIMESCALES**

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	<b>NO</b>	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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### 4. **BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1 This report covers the activities of the Corporate Parenting Committee during the 2020/21 municipal year. The content has been endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Committee for presentation and scrutiny by the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee. We have included information about some key activities that have taken place in the 2021/22 year in order to ensure that the Scrutiny Committee has up to date information. This includes a summary of the findings of the Focused Visit by Ofsted in respect of the progress of children and young people in care, and the development of the Sufficiency Strategy. It is acknowledged that some of this information has been shared with Children and Education Scrutiny previously but is included again here as it is directly relevant to the work of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

- 4.1.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee has continued to work to support the needs and ambitions of the Council’s Children in Care and Care Leavers and the meeting format where meetings alternate between formal and informal has continued to work well. The informal meetings, which are held in private, are attended by children and young people in care and care leavers and enable very positive engagement and in-depth discussion about relevant issues with Members.

#### 4.2 **Work Programme and Reporting Mechanisms**

- 4.2.1 The thematic meetings have continued, where a single topic is considered in depth to enable councillors to fully understand the complexity of the issue in the round, have a proper opportunity to scrutinise the information before them and challenge officers in a timely and thorough manner. The Committee focuses on three key areas for children and young people: education; placement; and health. These are linked across the formal and informal meetings and have been effective in developing ideas and themes for Members to scrutinise.

- 4.2.2 Due to Covid restrictions from March 2020 there was no Corporate Parenting Committee until September 2020. This meant there were 2 formal and 2 informal meetings in the municipal year

- 4.2.3 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. This dashboard and relevant performance data is discussed at formal meetings, ensuring that there is Member oversight of performance.

#### 4.3 **Corporate Parenting Committee**

##### 4.3.1 Champions:

This has continued to be an effective use of Member influence. Champions are Members who sit on the Committee but have also volunteered to take a particular lead for an area that impacts on Children in Care and Care Leavers.

The Corporate Parenting Champions 2020-21 have been

Area of Focus	Champion	Officer Lead
Housing, Finance and Benefits	Councillor Sandra Bond	Sean Evans
Education Employment and Training and Access to Higher Education	Councillor Bashir	Pat Carrington
Health	Councillor Robinson	Catherine York
Recreation and Leisure Activities	Councillor Howard	Jodie Chambers
Effective Care Planning	Councillor Jones	Michaela Berry

In between each informal Committee the Corporate Parenting Champion has been responsible for the following:

- Meeting with the Lead Officer.
- Undertaking a site visit (Virtual where required)
- Meeting with a child in care / young person / service user / other officers and discuss their experience of the service for Children in Care; and Contributing to a brief report back to the Committee.

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#### 4.3.2 Outcomes from Corporate Parenting Committee

- Staying Put Policy reviewed and amended.
- Worked closely with lead Personal Advisor on creating supports for Care Leavers.
- Collaborative work with Participation for cards to be provided for workers to send to children in care as an introduction.
- Consulted with the CiC around Child in care packs developed for various age groups to be given to children when they come into care.
- Participation in the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services Focused Visit in June 2021
- Representation of the areas of focus and concern for the Committee to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, October 2021
- Letters of concern written to national health colleagues in relation to dental and initial health assessment needs of CIC.

#### 4.4 **CIC Population**

4.4.1 Between March 2020 and September 2020 there was a steady increase in the number of children in care, and this peaked at 396. The impact of Covid on families has had a significant impact on Children's Services including the number of children in care, although the number of children and young people in care reduced from this peak to 364 by the end of March 2021.

4.4.2 Peterborough has continued to maintain stability of placements for children in care. At the end of April 2021 89 out of 131 who were in care for 2.5 years or more had maintained their current placement for 2 years or more. This equates to 67.9% which is 0.9% higher than last year and 0.9% higher than statistical neighbors. It is lower than the region at 69% and England at 68%

4.4.3 For Children in Care with 3 or more placements in 12 months the data from the monthly report in April 2021 shows us that 7.5% of CIC have experienced 3 or more placement moves in 12 months.

4.4.4 Although this is good performance relative to our statistical neighbours at 12%, the region at 10% and England at 11%, we continue to do all we can to reduce the number of children who have three or more placement moves further.

#### 4.5 Focused Visit Outcome

4.5.1 Ofsted visited Peterborough in June 2021 as part of its Inspection of Children's Services (ILACS) framework. This was not a judgement inspection but took the form of a Focused Visit looking particularly at the experiences of children in care to Peterborough and the quality of services provided to them. The Inspectors did also consider overall leadership and management in the Authority, staffing and caseloads, and, in this instance, our response to managing the demands of the pandemic.

4.5.2 In summary, this was an extremely successful visit that recognised the high quality of our Corporate Parenting Service and particularly the stability of experience for our children and young people and the strength of our permanency planning and support to placements. Ofsted called Peterborough Council "a conscientious corporate parent" and found a range of very positive factors about our care of our children. The Ofsted response included the following points of encouragement:

- *They felt the number of children in care in Peterborough remains relatively constant.*
- *The Children in care experience shows stable placements.*
- *Most children live with suitable carers who can meet their needs.*
- *Peterborough City Council social workers undertake thoughtful and thorough placement planning that considers children's views and wishes.*
- *Once in care, children rarely move other than in a planned way. Every effort is made to prevent children from having to move.*
- *Children in care have been seen regularly by their social workers during periods of restriction due to Covid-19.*
- *Assessments are clear and concise and provide an appropriate level of critical analysis. Plans reflect children's lives and consider their needs, wishes and feelings.*
- *Children in care are involved in a range of activities that influence service developments and enrich their experiences. These include recruiting workers, acting as young inspectors, and leading the development of materials to support new entrants to care.*
- *Children spoken to are confident that senior managers listen to their views and take action to respond.*
- *Good attention is paid to children's physical and emotional well-being*
- *Services for children in care with disabilities and complex health needs are well managed.*
- *Independent reviewing officers produce thorough and detailed review reports.*
- *Staff understand the importance of education in supporting placement stability.*
- *Accurate performance management information provides senior leaders with a clear understanding and knowledge of practice and the experiences and progress of children in care.*

The local authority's quality assurance framework is well developed, and social workers have the tools they need to be able to practice effectively and have manageable caseloads. The workforce is stable, and the authority recognises the importance of low staff turnover to providing consistent, reliable support and care. Leaders are visible and accessible. They are involved in key decision-making for children in care and know children well.

4.5.3 The Focused Visit was a reminder of the need to continue to strive to achieve the very best for our children in care. The Inspectors stated clearly that the whole service really cares about the children and young people we work with, and that our primary concern is always what is best for them. This reflects extremely well in staff and the partnership team, but also on the leadership and challenge offered by the Corporate Parenting Committee.

## 4.6 Meeting Educational Needs

- 4.6.1 The Virtual School continues to promote the need for all concerned with children and young people in care to have high aspirations through training of carers, social workers and designated teachers, and scrutiny by PVS staff of all Personal Education Plans. The child's voice is a priority and the changes recommended by the Children in Care Council have been made to the section of the PEP seeking the views of children and young people. These views are a subject for discussion at the PEP meeting and targets are set with the child or young person to further any ambitions. Changes have also been made to the attainment section of the PEP to ensure greater accuracy of data.
- 4.6.2 The support of those children and young people placed out of city has been enhanced using the virtual meeting facility so PVS staff are able to attend more PEP meetings and have easier access to designated teachers. Children and young people have also found it easier to participate in their PEP meetings.

## 4.7 Covid 19 - Response of Peterborough Virtual School

- 4.7.1 The Ofsted report of the Focused Visit in June 2021 noted:  
*“During the COVID19 pandemic, the virtual school has been active in addressing the educational and social needs of children. Staff understand the importance of education in supporting placement stability. Careful child-centred planning between foster carers, social workers and the virtual school has enabled children’s education to continue while taking account of foster carers’ individual circumstances. All children in care have up-to-date, good-quality personal education plans. When a placement change necessitates a change of schools, effective collaboration between the virtual school and social workers ensures that the school is best able to meet the child’s needs are identified.”*
- 4.7.2 From March 20th, 2020, following the restricted opening of schools and other education settings (the service delivery of the Peterborough Virtual School) was adapted to enable continued support of the children and young people in care, social workers, carers and designated staff in schools and other education providers. Throughout the pandemic, the priority remains the emotional and educational well-being of the children and young people on the role of the virtual school, wherever they are placed.
- 4.7.3 During the period of the pandemic when schools were closed to pupils generally, our children and young people in care were entitled to a school place within the category of vulnerable groups. Social workers and carers were supported by the virtual school to make the decision as to whether children in their care should attend school as attendance was not compulsory. The PEP (Personal Education Plan) process was amended during the summer of restricted school openings with the usual meetings suspended except for children new into care or those with a change of school or carer. Designated teachers were required to complete an altered version explaining what and how work was being provided, how they were staying connected and what if any support was required for those not in school. Any issues relating to completion of work or lack of appropriate equipment in the home were also reported. There were different methods of delivery of work for completion at home by schools. Some chose to provide work packs initially, moving to online and virtual lessons as the term progressed. The need to home school put significant pressure on carers and children and young people – and the virtual school offered support to both carers and children and young people.
- 4.7.4 Virtual school support for children and stakeholders during the lockdown and beyond has included:
- providing advice and guidance to designated school staff on the bespoke Covid -19 Summer Term Personal Education Plan and process established a consultation phone line for all stakeholders with our Specialist Education Psychologist, acknowledging heightened anxiety for some carers, children, and colleagues continued to provide work and support to those children and young people already identified by the virtual school Intervention team to sustain learning momentum

- continued to fund online tuition sessions from an external provider for children and young people living out of city
- held weekly virtual KIT meetings with designated school staff to monitor well-being of those children attending school
- collected and analysed school attendance data
- provided IT equipment if needed to facilitate home working
- offered advice to carers to support learning at home and provided a resource guide to supplement work provided by schools
- challenged schools where their learning offer was not of an acceptable standard
- attended virtual transition PEP meetings for Early Years, Year 6 and 11 pupils and facilitated additional transition opportunities for the more vulnerable.

#### 4.8 **Placement Sufficiency**

4.8.1 This area became an increasing challenge during the last municipal year as long-term trends and Covid combined to precipitate a serious problem. There is a significant national shortage of placements for children and young people of all ages, with a particularly acute shortage for older children and young people and for those who have any form of challenging behaviour, are at risk of exploitation, have complex disabilities and/or who have mental and emotional health needs. This shortage has resulted in rapidly escalating costs for those placements that are available.

4.8.2 In an authority like Peterborough 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 in more specialist placements.

4.8.3 Our preference is to ensure that more of our children and young people are placed locally. We have therefore published the new Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council Sufficiency Strategy 2021 –2024. We have also restructured our Fostering Services, investing in recruitment and a more supportive offer to our existing carers. This is an ongoing piece of work, which will support our placement sufficiency in the local area, but the national problems remain and are being monitored closely by the Corporate Parenting Committee.

#### 4.9 **Independent Review of Children’s Social Care**

4.9.1 In October 2021, the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care visited Peterborough. The Government established the Review in March 2021 with the aim of investigating what needs to change to improve the lives of our most vulnerable children and families. The review is looking at the whole journey of the child and family through children’s social care services, early help systems and including how families and children are supported by partner agencies and the voluntary sector. The review published The Case for Change in June 2021, setting out the issues that the review considered to be some of the biggest challenges for the system.

The review is asking 3 big questions of practice and the system itself. Does the continuum of help and protection work (ie managing early help and child protection services together)? Can or should some or all services be managed on local, regional, or national lines? And freedom and responsibility - how should social work autonomy be framed and what is useful regulation, monitoring, and oversight in our services?

It also identified a number of themes which it considers are likely to be barriers to services working together as best they can. These include:

- Funding issues and particularly the increasing amount being spent on statutory [and especially on child in care] services
- Recruitment and retention issues for qualified and experienced social workers
- A view that there is insufficient national coordination and accountability for outcomes for children [e.g. at national government, the Departments for Health, for Education, the Home

Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities all have responsibilities that affect children and families]

- A view that the system, as a whole, is complicated, bureaucratic and risk averse.

The review wanted to test out some of these ideas with visits to 10 Local Authorities and Peterborough was asked to be involved. The visit took place from 17 to 19<sup>th</sup> October from a team from the Department for Education. The chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee and the lead Member were both interviewed by the Review and made comment about this situation and other factors impacting on our children in care and care leavers.

Feedback at the time was very positive in terms of how the Government team had evaluated the work, services, and commitment to children at all levels of the organisation. The Committee looks forward to more formal comment from the Independent Review about areas of strength, areas for development and how Peterborough has been able to contribute to the national conversation about the future of children's services.

#### **4.10 Links to the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers' Drop In**

4.10.1 The Children in Care Council continues to meet monthly and has 8 regular members. The group is well attended during school holiday periods when activities are offered in addition to the normal meeting. In the last 12 months, along with their co-chairing duties at the informal Corporate Parenting Committee meetings, the group has:

4.10.2 The Children in Care Council have engaged in a number of activities including:

- Providing feedback to the IROs on their review paperwork.
- *Planned and delivered the annual celebration events for children in care.*
- *Spoken at Corporate Parenting Committee about their experiences in different placements.*
- *Co-chair the Informal Corporate Parenting Committee.*
- *Introduced Young Inspectors who are taking an active role in reviewing aspects of service delivery that they use.*

4.10.3 The 'Children in Charge' youth group for children aged between 8 and 12 continues to meet in alternating weeks. It is regularly attended by an average of 10 young people.

The Care Leavers' drop in continues to operate, attracting an average of 6 young people at each session. They have been consulted on the new "passport to independence" piece of work which evidenced they are ready to live on their own, this has successfully been trialled and implemented.

4.10.4 A second year of full activity programme was offered to children and young people in the summer encompassing a variety of activities and events curated by Children in Care Council members for young people to increase reach and engagement with this group. Young people and their carers have consistently reported back how much they value this because they feel that they are part of a community.

4.10.5 The Care leaver drop in could not continue during the Covid lockdown due to the restrictions, although this is now running again. The leaving care team were very aware of the impact of isolation during the Covid lockdown and kept in regular email, virtual, telephone and where necessary face to face contact with Care Leavers. We were able to provide laptops for all Care Leavers who needed them to ensure they could engage in online learning. Personal Advisors ensured that they were responsive to individual needs throughout the lockdown providing emergency assistance with food if needed, allowing young people to remain in placements when they were not able to move onto alternative accommodation and generally responding flexibly to the needs of Care Leavers in recognition of the new situation, we all found ourselves in.

#### **5. CONSULTATION**

5.1.1 The Children in Care Council has been fully aware and consulted upon the changes referred to in this paper. The feedback from them to date is that working with the Committee is a very positive experience, and that they value the opportunity to work with the Corporate Parenting

Champions.

- 5.1.2. The report has been shared with Councillor Ayres, Cabinet Member for Children Services in line with the Corporate Parenting Committee Terms of Reference.

## **6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT**

- 6.1 This report provides the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to understand the work of the Corporate Parenting Committee, to understand the impact of the Committee and be assured that all Members are acting as responsible corporate parents.

## **7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION**

- 7.1 To relay the work of the Corporate Parenting Committee to the Scrutiny Committee and present the annual report.

## **8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 8.1 *N/A*

## **9. IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

- 9.1 *None.*

### **Legal Implications**

- 9.2 None – as the report is for information and to invite comment.

### **Equalities Implications**

#### **9.3 Children in Care and Care Leaver**

This report provides information on the role of the Corporate Parenting Committee and relates to services provided to children in care and care leavers. This ensures that Scrutiny Committee are aware of changes to processes and the outcome for children in care and care leavers.

### **Rural Implications**

- 9.4 None

### **Carbon Impact Assessment**

- 9.5 There are no recommendations contained within this report, so there are no implications to carbon emissions. The report includes the objective of reducing the reliance on out of area placements for children, increasing the range of placements more locally will likely reduce greenhouse gas emissions from travel.

- 9.6 The report highlights all areas of activity in relation to Children in Care and Care Leavers and demonstrates how services to them are monitored and subject to continuous improvement. Any recommendations will directly impact on delivery of those services.

There are no other implications.

## **10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 10.1 *N/A*

## **11. APPENDICES**

None