

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE (FORMAL)	AGENDA ITEM No. 9
24 NOVEMBER 2021	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Corporate Parenting Committee Chairman	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	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 FOR THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2019-2020

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Corporate Parenting Committee Chairman	Deadline date: Date to be confirmed
It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agrees that the annual report is an accurate reflection of the work of the Committee over the last 12 months; and 2. Agree to submit the annual report to the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee for noting as per the Corporate Parenting Committee's Terms of Reference. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is submitted to Corporate Parenting Committee following Children and Education Scrutiny Committee requiring an annual report on the role of 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 2019-2020
- 2.2 This report is for Corporate Parenting Committee to consider under all its Terms of Reference number 2.4.6.4 The Corporate Parenting Committee will report to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and to the Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis or more frequently if required.
- 2.3 The 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 addressing the increase in the Children in Care population; the changes to the partnership with TACT; and Children in Care and Care Leavers' education and training needs.

3. TIMESCALES

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

4.1 Following the changes engendered by the Ofsted Inspection of 2018, the Corporate Parenting Committee has continued to work to support the needs and ambitions of the Council's Children in Care and Care Leavers.

4.1.1 The meeting format has continued to work well, especially at engaging our young people, and in depth discussion of issues relevant to our Children in Care and Care Leavers.

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.

Corporate Parenting Committee

4.3 Champions:

4.3.1 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 2019–2020 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		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.

Outcomes from Corporate Parenting Committee

- 4.3.2 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 CiCC 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

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.

- 4.4.2 As of March 2021 there were 364 children in care.

- 4.4.3 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%

- 4.4.4 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.

- 4.4.5 We continue to strive for this to reduce but the figure compares well with our statistical neighbours at 12%, the region at 10% and England at 11%

- 4.4.6 The numbers have increased 1.5% from last year, possibly showing the impact that Covid has had on foster families.

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 us "*a conscientious corporate parent*" and found a range of very positive factors about our care of our children. These included:

- The number of children in care in Peterborough remains relatively constant.
- Children in care experience 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
- 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 best able to meet the
- child's needs is identified.

4.7.2 From March 20th, 2020, following the restricted opening of schools and other education settings the service delivery of PVS (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. Our priority was the emotional and educational well-being of the children and young people on our school roll.

4.7.3 All children and young people in care were entitled to a school place within the category of vulnerable groups and social workers and carers were supported by PVS 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 – PVS offered support to both carers and children and young people.

4.7.4 PVS support for children and stakeholders during lockdown in addition to business as usual.

- issued, in conjunction with CVS, immediate and ongoing guidance for foster carers and social workers to support accessing school places for those children requiring the service and eligible within the 'vulnerable' group.
- provided 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 PVS 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 PVS 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 an extreme 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 at higher tariffs.
- 4.8.3 This is not what we would want for children and is not beneficial to either their care planning or our ability to meet need. In response, we published a new Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council Sufficiency Strategy 2021 -2024, endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Committee, and have entirely 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. In October, 2021, the chair and lead Member were both interviewed by the independent Review of Children's Social Care and made comment about this situation and other factors impacting on our children in care and care leavers.
- 4.9 Links to the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers' Drop In**
- 4.9.1 The Children in Care Council continues to meet on a monthly basis 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:
- Given 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.
 - And introduced Young Inspectors who are taking an active role in reviewing aspects of service delivery that they use. They have produced a report with an action plan on their activity.
- 4.9.2 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.
- 4.9.3 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.
- 4.9.4 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.
- 4.9.5 The Care leaver drop in could not continue during the Covid lockdown due to the restrictions (it has recently re started we are very pleased to say). 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 on line 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 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.

5.2 The report will be 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 If the Corporate Parenting Committee agrees the recommendations in this report, it will be presented to the next Children and Education Scrutiny Committee in the new municipal year

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

7.1 For presentation at Children and Education Scrutiny Committee.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 N/A

9. IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Financial Implications

None

9.2 Legal Implications

None

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.

9.4 Carbon Impact Assessment

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 as its contribution to carbon off setting.

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

11.1 None

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