

# **Corporate Parenting Report**

**Council – 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

## **1 Corporate Parenting Overview**

- 1.1 The Children & Social Work Act 2017 states when a child comes into the care of the Local Authority, or is under 25 and was previously looked after by the Local Authority, the Local Authority becomes their 'Corporate Parent'.
- 1.2 The responsibility of a Corporate Parent is to make sure the decision making, planning and provision for care experienced children and young people affords them the opportunities and outcomes that other children have. This routinely includes being concerned about their care, health, education and preparation for adulthood. Under the Children Act 2004, the Local Authority also has a duty to promote cooperation with 'relevant partners', which includes Health, Police and Schools.
- 1.3 All County Councillors are Corporate Parents. The Gloucestershire Corporate Parenting Group is made up of a number of key representatives, including elected members with targeted responsibilities. Cllr Stephen Davies, (Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years), is the chairperson for the group and accountable politically for Children's Services. This includes a specialist responsibility to communicate and engage partners and communities to meet the needs of children, particularly in respect of safeguarding and promoting their welfare.
- 1.4 There are four Corporate Parenting Group Meetings that take place each year. The remaining 2021/22 Corporate Parenting Group Meeting is scheduled for 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022

## **2 Corporate Parenting Group Activity**

- 2.1 The Peer Mentoring Project update was presented by Eliza (Peer Mentoring Co-ordinator) looking at the development of the programme and progress during the first year of the project. Funding has been secured for a second year which will enable the project to recruit more mentors and mentees enabling more care experienced young people to benefit. Future developments will include weekly Monday morning meet ups for mentors and mentees with opportunities for training and personal development, for example safeguarding, First Aid and confidence building activities. This work is overseen by The Participation Team and links in with the wider work of the Ambassadors facilitating children and young people to have a voice.

2.2 The Fostering Transformation Project - Over the last year, we have reviewed our fostering service and offer and with feedback from foster carers, and from children in care, the service are looking at what needs to happen to improve even further. To do this we have embarked upon a transformation project that will focus on the following key areas:

- **Service Development** includes the vision and values for the service and the training programme for staff and foster carers.
- **Support to Foster Carers** includes the development of bespoke support services and out of hours arrangements.
- **Support to Children** will develop enhanced, joined up support arrangements for children.
- **Recruitment and Retention** includes a refresh of our marketing strategy and fostering offer.
- **Placements** includes a review of how we make placements for children to achieve the best match.
- **Care Planning** will look at how we improve arrangements for long term fostering matches.
- **Quality Assurance** includes how we measure the experience of foster carers and children in care.

The project is overseen by a strategic board chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care and includes representatives from partner agencies like health and the Virtual School.

2.3 The Private Fostering annual report was presented and reported on the year 2020 – 2021. Private Fostering is when a child or young person under the age of 16, or 18 if disabled, is cared for by someone other than a parent or close relative (grand parent, aunt or uncle, brother or sister) for a consecutive period of 28 days or more. Overall the numbers of notifications and children living in Privately Fostered arrangements has slightly increased this year compared to the last two years. There continues to be a challenge to ensure all professionals and members of the public are aware of what constitutes a Private Fostering arrangement and how to make a notification to the Local Authority in relation to this.

2.4 The service saw an increase in children who were living in Private Fostered arrangements this period which indicate an improvement in the awareness locally which is positive.

2.5 The reporting year has been extraordinary in relation to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenge this has had on the service, other professionals and families. It is reassuring that overall 87% of children subject to new notifications were seen within 10 days (56% within 7 days) and 9/12 months the % of statutory visits to children was above the current target. For the

forthcoming year the target for the service is to see 90% of all children for initial visits and 85% for follow up visits in line with the regulated timescales. It is hoped that the development of the data performance will be achieved in the forthcoming year which will undoubtedly support and improve the overall management and oversight of the Private Fostering provision.

2.6 Charter Supporting Care Experienced Parents. Mark Bone presented a charter that some other local authorities had signed up too, making a statement of commitment regarding how they will support young people who are either in care or have left care when they become parents and to help overcome some of the disadvantages that are experienced.

2.7 Corporate parents were asked to consider adopting the recommendations within the charter. Following a raise of hands Corporate Parents unanimously agreed.

### **3 Next Corporate Parenting Group**

3.1 The next Corporate Parenting Group due to be convened on 9 December 2021 will discuss the following:

- Virtual School Annual Report
- Voice of Young people
- Early Help Overview
- Update on launch Cllr's One Page Profiles

### **4 Children in Care and Care Leavers Data**

4.1 During 2020, with the development of the COVID-19 global pandemic, referrals for statutory children's social work services initially dropped. Quarter 3 2021/22 proved to be particularly challenging. The emergence of latent demand that was anticipated due to Covid, alongside higher levels of vacancies, turnover and absence have been the key factors.

4.2 The number of children in care continued to increase throughout Quarter 3, with 843 children in care at the end of December. This continues to place strain on the availability of suitable placements for children and our ability to place children within County (75.2%). Overall, 64% of children in our care are looked after by in-house Foster Carers. This remains the same as last quarter and has reduced from 70% in March 2021. This has been affected by growth in the background population, as the overwhelming majority of our available in-house foster care capacity is utilised (99.3%); the reduction equates to 12 children. Performance is worse than target (70%).

- 4.3 Just under one in five children are accommodated in care under a Section 20 agreement compared with almost one in three children two years ago (19.8%). Performance is within tolerance of the stretch target implemented at the beginning of Quarter 3. We continue to have higher than national levels of children accommodated under a Section 20 agreement but have narrowed the gap from 10% points to 2.8% points during 2021.
- 4.4 There was an improvement in the number of children in care having 3 or more placements within a 12-month period in Quarter 3, down from 16.2% last quarter to 13.2%. This is within tolerance of target for the first time over the past three years. However, we continue to see a higher proportion of our children in care experiencing short-term placement instability than the peer group average (9.5%). Long-term placement stability performance is within tolerance of stretch target implemented at the start of Quarter 3 (68%) but worse than the peer group average (70%, Mar-21). Performance declined for the third quarter, from 69.3% at the end of March to 65.6% at the end of December.
- 4.5 Just over one-fifth of our children in care, for whom we are the corporate parent, were classified as persistently absent (an attendance rate of less than 90% of school days) in Quarter 3 (22.5%). This is higher than last quarter (18.4%) and the same time last year (18.1%). 7.9% of school aged children in care were classified as persistently absent due to illness.
- 4.6 At the end of December there were 465 Care Leavers. The greater majority of care leavers aged 19-21 years are living in suitable accommodation (90.4%), although performance has dipped since last quarter (94.4%), and it remains within tolerance of target (95%). For older care leavers, performance is worse than target for the first time in 6 months (87.9%). For younger care leavers, performance has been worse than target throughout 2021 (85%). 44.9% of Care Leavers aged 19-21 years were not in employment, education or training at the end of Quarter 3; this is similar to last quarter. Performance is slightly better for Care Leavers aged over 21 (43.1%) and our 16-18 year olds (39.3%). However, this remains significantly worse than target (25%). The proportion of Care Leavers in higher education improved in Quarter 3 and was within tolerance of target for first time in 2021 (4.9%, 23 young people). Performance was similar to the peer group average but remains below national levels (5.0% and 6.0% respectively).

**Cllr Stephen Davies**

**Cabinet Member – Children’s Safeguarding & Early Years**