

Corporate Parenting

Council - 23 March 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 March 2022.

2 Inspection

- 2.1 On 31 January 2022, Ofsted announced the long-awaited full inspection of children's services under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Framework . The report setting out the findings of the three-week long inspection will be published on 1st April 2022. Inspectors considered all aspects of children's social care, including the experiences and progress of children in and leaving our care.
- 2.2 Verbal feedback provided by inspectors during the inspection echoed the information that has been provided to Council previously as part of these and other reports. It is not possible to provide detailed information prior to the report being published however, it is worth noting the significant progress that has been made since the last

full inspection in 2017. Whilst there is still some way to go to ensure that all our children receive the help, protection, care and support they should, no child was referred to Directors as being at immediate risk of harm and a number of strengths that validate the improvements made to date were identified as improving children's lives.

- 2.3 For children in care and those who are care experienced, inspectors identified a number of positives including direct work practice such as helping children understand their life story and the tenacity with which workers build and maintain relationships with young people. Inspectors also identified a number of strengths in planning for permanency, including adoption, but also highlighted that for some children, this takes too long.
- 2.4 The full report and Gloucestershire's response, in the form of a continuing improvement plan will be presented to Council in July 2022.

3 Corporate Parenting Group activity

- 3.1 The last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Group took place on 9 December 2021.
- 3.2 Twenty-two councillors have now signed up to provide one-page profiles that will enable children and young people in our care to identify opportunities that councillors as corporate parents can provide. This could be anything from work experience in a chosen job role or profession through to an opportunity to find out more about the role of a local councillor and the democratic process. The scheme will launch soon with young people able to access profiles as part of the corporate parenting offer.
- 3.3 The Annual Health Report was presented, and the Group informed that Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Trust has adopted "Language That Cares", following input from our Ambassadors. The Group also considered the impact of work aimed at improving the timeliness of Health Assessments for children in care (now at 85% with a target of 95%).
- 3.4 The Peer Mentoring Project update was presented by Eliza (Peer Mentoring Co-ordinator) with information on plans for year two of the project provided to Council in the Corporate Parenting Report of February 2022.
- 3.5 An update on the Fostering Transformation Project was also provided in February's report to Council as was Private Fostering and the Charter for care experienced parents. More recently, Gloucestershire County Council has been awarded the Fostering Network's Fostering Friendly Employer status. 40% of foster carers also work and this scheme recognises employers who encourage and enable foster carers amongst their employees. Gloucestershire County Council wishes to lead the way and will use its new status to encourage district councils and other local employers to take up the challenge of improving support to foster carers by

considering how to adapt HR policies and take action to promote fostering amongst its employees.

4 Family Hub development and Youth Services

- 4.1 Gloucestershire is embarking on a re-design of its Children Centres and Youth Services, to create Family Hubs that will offer seamless multi-agency services for children and young people aged 0-19 years. The model for Family Hubs is being co-produced and involves working with parents, partners, and local community groups. The plan is to move away from large countywide contracts toward a locality-based model, which understands and represents the children, young people and families that it serves. Over the past year a number of consultation events have taken place with young people, families, partners and local communities to hear from and ensure we better understand the community's needs. This is informing the design for the new family hub model.
- 4.2 Family Hubs will offer an open door with universal through to targeted support and will include the provision of midwifery and health visiting services, open access family services, parenting programmes, community cafes and more. This design and co-production phase has been met with enthusiasm from those involved. The plan is for the Hubs to be developed over the forthcoming three years with a focus this year on the re-commissioning of youth services and children centres as the basis from which the Family Hub model will develop further.
- 4.3 For children in care, care experienced young people, their family and foster carers, Family Hubs will offer local universal and targeted services that are non-stigmatised and accessible. This will mean both specific provision such as activity sessions for children in care, family time sessions and support groups for foster carers, alongside activities and sessions that will be open to all children, young people and families.
- 4.4 Care experienced parents will have nearby midwifery as well as specialist support and will benefit from the opportunity to build and maintain good relationships with the midwife, health visitor and other parents. Healthy life/healthy weight will be a golden thread within the Family Hub model as it aims to improve health outcomes and will include community cafe's, affordable fresh food, cookery, and parenting programmes. As part of the development of our services, the council will develop its role as "corporate grand-parent", making an explicit offer to those care experienced young people who have children.
- 4.5 The re-commissioned youth service will provide integrated substance misuse services, housing support and dedicated Education, Employment and Training support for care experienced young people, including participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

5 Next Corporate Parenting Group

5.1 The next Corporate Parenting Group due to be convened on 24 March 2022 will discuss the following:

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

6 Children in Care and Care Leavers' data

6.1 During 2020, with the development of the COVID-19 global pandemic, referrals to children's social care initially dropped, however, Quarter 3 saw an anticipated resurgence in demand as COVID restrictions continued to reduce and hardship increased for many families. This coincided with increased levels of staff turnover and vacancy which created a significant service wide challenge.

6.2 Quarter 4 has continued to evidence a higher rate of demand at all levels of the children's system, whilst investment in the workforce appears to be helping to stabilise turnover and reduce vacancy rates.

6.3 The number of children in care has increased and is currently at 848 children, a rise of 11 since the close of Quarter 3. This is in part due to an increase in the number of unaccompanied children requiring our care. Whilst fostering and other care home provision has increased in line with the delivery of Gloucestershire's Sufficiency Strategy, capacity gains have been ameliorated by the growing numbers in care meaning that sufficiency remains a challenge.

6.4 Over three quarters (75.5%) of children in our care live in Gloucestershire and there is a reducing trend in the percentage that live more than 20 miles from their home address (19.7% from 22.9% in May 2021). Most children (64%) are cared for by Gloucestershire's foster carers, with utilisation in January 2022 at 100%. Fostering Transformation plans aim to increase the number of available fostering households to meet an initial target to care for 70% of our children.

6.5 One in five children (20.2%) are looked after under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, a reduction from one in four (25.5%) in May 2021, bringing Gloucestershire's performance closer to the National rate for 2021 of 18%.

6.6 Placement stability (3 or more moves) continues to improve and outcomes reaching target levels for the first time in January (performance at 12.9% against a target of

13% or below). However, longer term stability measured by children in our care having the same home for 2 of the past 2.5 years is worsening and is below target (performance at 64.5% with the target set at 68% or above).

- 6.7 Almost all children are seen within statutory timescales, their plans and reviews are up-to-date, and their views represented. A quarter (24.5%) of school age children are educated out of county, down from 28.8% in April 2021. However, 14.2% have experienced a school move and 8.6% have been suspended on at least one occasion since the start of the academic year. Most children have good (over 90%) attendance.
- 6.8 We are in touch with the majority of our 465 care experienced young people (92.1%). Most have an up-to-date pathway plan (87.3%) and live in suitable accommodation (88.6%). More than half are in some form of education, employment or training (54.9%) and, whilst this compares well with other local authorities, it is significantly below our aspirational target of 75%. The proportion of care experienced young people in Higher Education has improved since September (5.2% up from 3.9%) and is better than target and the peer group average (5%).

Cllr Stephen Davies

Cabinet Member – Children’s Safeguarding and Early Years