



REPORT TITLE: Corporate Parenting Report

County Council meeting:	24 May 2023
Member/Officer	Cllr Stephen Davies Cabinet Member – Children’s Safeguarding & Early Years
Purpose of Report	To update the Council on Corporate Parenting activity.
Recommendations/ Action sought	None
Resource Implications	N/A
Background Documents	Corporate Parenting Report – 22 March 2023
Equality Impact Assessment	N/A
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**Corporate Parenting Report
Council Meeting
May 2023**

1. Corporate Parenting Overview

- 1.1. The Children and 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 Group last met on 16th March 2023. This was the fifth meeting of the year and took place as a hybrid meeting.

2. Corporate Parenting Group Activity

- 2.1. The last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Group took place on 16th March 2023 and was a hybrid meeting. The next meeting will be in person on 29th June 2023 at the Social Work Academy and will be held as a workshop with carers, partners, and young people to develop a new corporate parenting strategy.
- 2.2. The meeting received Gloucestershire's report submitted to the National Child Safeguarding Review Panel as part of its review of **Children with Disabilities in Residential Settings**. The National Panel has published two reports setting out its findings and recommendations for national government and local safeguarding partners.
- 2.3. The Gloucestershire report provided information on the review of all children with disabilities in a residential special school setting and was undertaken in the late summer/early autumn of 2022. This was in addition to Gloucestershire's usual undertaking of commissioning and Children Act responsibilities for the child/ren. Twenty-six children were identified for review, fourteen of whom had extremely complex needs and lived in a residential special school setting. Each setting was visited by the Disabled Children and Young People's Head of Service as well as a

specialist Commissioner and each child's review involved a visit, case file audit and review of the setting's latest Ofsted report. Four residential special schools were visited where Gloucestershire children live.

2.4. The review made a small number of service specific recommendations to each provider, the implementation of which will be monitored by the service but found that care and safeguarding for children and young people in all four residential special schools to be satisfactory.

2.5. The meeting also received the **Virtual School's Annual Report**. The following was noted from the report:

- Over 1400 educational professionals had been trained to support children who had experienced trauma.
- The Virtual School was focusing on the quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPS) and on increasing inclusivity.
- Schools were increasingly engaged in achieving for children in care and children in need of help and protection in response to the virtual school's extended duties to children with a social worker. The virtual school was strengthening links with schools and incentivising their further engagement.
- Attendance was above national but still room to improve and the virtual school is working with schools to help increase attendance. (This will also be the subject of a forthcoming deep dive report to the Continuous Improvement Board).

2.6. Ambassadors and the Director presented Gloucestershire's revised **Care Leaver's Offer** which contains the following additions:

- The Setting Up Home Allowance has been increased from £2,000 to £3,000.
- Additional support for learning to drive, digital inclusivity and unforeseen costs.

2.7. Two additional housing support officers have been secured with additional government funding aimed at preventing homelessness however, it was noted that move-on accommodation for young people is increasingly scarce and that 'affordability tests' imposed by housing associations means young people are finding it increasingly difficult to secure a tenancy when they are ready to move on. This means Gloucestershire County Council bears unnecessary housing and support costs well beyond the time that it is needed by some young people. This in turn, reduces the availability of supported accommodation for those that do need it and brings a cost pressure to the council of around £5m per annum. A new housing protocol developed with District Council colleagues will help maintain the priority our young people must have for move-on accommodation.

2.8. The Ambassadors expressed their support for the revised Offer, stating that what was available for care leavers in Gloucestershire was, in their view, good. They stressed how important it is to ensure all young people know what they were entitled to.

2.9. The Offer was launched at The Exceptionals, Care Leaver's Award Ceremony the following week.

2.10. **Gloucestershire's Response to the Government's Implementation**

Strategy in response to the Care Review was also discussed, with the six pillars noted as:

- Pillar 1: Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families.
- Pillar 2: A decisive multi-agency child protection system
- Pillar 3: Unlocking the potential of family networks.
- Pillar 4: Putting love, relationships, and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care.
- Pillar 5: A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one.
- Pillar 6: A system that continuously learns and improves and makes better use of evidence and data.

2.11. A £2 million additional investment has been announced to support local authorities in early adoption of some of the pillars. Gloucestershire has applied to be an early adopter in the fifth pillar developing an early career framework.

2.12. The proposed reforms were welcomed; however, the meeting highlighted the importance of all agencies supporting children and young people as they grow up and leave care, with mental health support noted as particularly important by ambassadors. Sufficiency and the benefits and disbenefits of a regional approach to sufficiency was also debated, with recognition that the southwest has a regional sufficiency programme as part of its sector led improvement activity.

3. **Voice and participation**

3.1. The Exceptionals Award Evening took place at Gloucester Rugby Club on 22nd March and was a tremendous success celebrating the achievements of our young people. The evening included inspirational speakers, elected members who attend corporate parenting group, officers, carers, ambassadors, and young people. More events are planned, and we hope to continue to our relationship with the businesses and partners that sponsored the awards and who are helping make Gloucestershire a county where we build a great corporate family for children in and leaving our care.

4. **Easter Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)**

4.1. The Easter HAF **reached over 7,800 children in total** and over 5,300 children who are free school meals (FSM) eligible. Whilst take-up for FSM was slightly below that of last year, the diversity and spread of provision across the county increased and the percentage of FSM eligible children accessing HAF in Gloucestershire far exceeded the national average for 2021-22 of 27%.

4.2. The parent carers survey demonstrates a high satisfaction rate regarding the range and quality of provision, including increases in satisfaction with the offer for children and young people with SEND.

4.3. The programme was visited by the DFE with a visit to open access provision in Kingsholm, Gloucester, delivered by Play Gloucestershire, Read with Me and the HAF food truck. The funding for this particular provision brought together HAF and Levelling Up funds to demonstrate how the HAF offer can be part of an offer that brings activities and a nutritious meal offer to the entire family within the local

community.

4.4. We were also really pleased to hear from DfE that The Venture Community Hub has been chosen as one of only two South West Regional HAF champion winners for 2023. Council and Venture representatives will attend a presentation event the House of Commons later this month.

5. Corporate parenting training for councillors

5.1. Corporate parenting training for councillors was delivered by the LGA in April and was a chance to learn more about the role and the actions they can take to be a great corporate parent. 15 councillors attended.

5.2. National Foster Care Fortnight 2023 is running from 15th to 28th May and is focused on fostering communities. There were lots of ways for councillors to get involved and promote fostering in our local communities as set out and promoted on our website and in local media¹.

6. Next Corporate Parenting Group

6.1. The next Corporate Parenting Group will take place on 29th June 2023 and will be in person. It will receive the Annual Report and will take the form of a workshop, with wider attendance from partners, young people, and carers to focus on the development of a new corporate parenting strategy for the county.

7. Children in Care and Care Leavers' Data: Quarter 4 2022-23

7.1. Overall, just under half of corporate performance measures were within tolerance or better than target in Quarter 4, evidencing an improvement for the second quarter in succession. The proportion of case audits rated Good or better continued to grow with Quarter 4 performance above the target of 50% or more graded good or better in each month and the vast majority graded Requires Improvement or better (90%). Social Worker stability and long-term placement stability also increased to within tolerance of target.

7.2. In terms of workforce, Quarter 4 has continued to evidence slightly reduced turnover and vacancy rates with most teams now having a full complement of staff. Recent recruitment has helped to increase the percentage of the workforce holding an allocated workload at or below 18 children per full-time social worker and continues the month-on-month improvement evident since November (61.4% to 76.4%). Whilst this is still below target, performance at the end of March represented a 12-month high, with most workers holding 23 children or fewer (97.4%).

7.3. Turnover in the 12 months to the end of December reduced for the third quarter to 12.7% which is the same level as for the council as a whole and similar to the 12 months prior to the pandemic. However, workforce stability and capacity continue to be challenging and there is an ongoing reliance on agency social workers who make up 35% of the workforce.

7.4. The majority of children have had two or fewer Social Workers in the last 6 months (86.5%). Performance is within tolerance of target.

¹ [Foster Care Fortnight - Fostering \(goucestershire.gov.uk\)](https://www.goucestershire.gov.uk/fostering)

7.5. In March, 96% of workers had a timely professional supervision. 80.9% of children had a timely case supervision recorded on their file at the end of March which is a reduction for the third quarter and is an area for focused improvement.

Specific to Children in Care

7.6. At the end of March, there were 865 children in care, a reduction from 875 at the start of the Quarter. However, the number remains high with a monthly average of 865 children during 2022/23 when compared with previous years.

7.7. Two-thirds of children in foster placements are looked after by in-house Foster Carers (68%); this has remained similar for the last year. The majority of in-house foster care capacity is being utilised (83.6% of available placements) with the remaining capacity allowing for suitable matches to be made for new children or those that must move.

7.8. We have revised our Sufficiency Strategy, Home@TheHeart 2022-26 was approved by Cabinet in January 2023 and sets how we intend to develop sufficient local, high-quality homes, largely through growing our fostering population but also through the development of our own children's homes, family assessment centre and supported accommodation. Progress is being made with the completion of building work on one children's home and development of our second site.

7.9. Currently however, the care market remains challenging and our ability to place children within county has reduced to 70.1%, with the proportion of children placed out of county and more than 20 miles from home at 26.2%, (up from 20.3% at the same time last year). This is worse than target and below the performance of statistical neighbours (22.4% in March 2022).

7.10. The proportion of children in care that moved three or more times over the preceding twelve months worsened to 14.8% (128 children) from 13.8% (121 children) in Quarter 3 and is worse than target and significantly below the statistical neighbours (9.7%, March 2022).

7.11. Long-term placement stability however, improved over the quarter with two-thirds of children who have been in care for more than two and a half years living in a settled home for more than two years (66.1%, up from 62.3% at the end of December). Whilst there is still some way to go to reach the statistical neighbour average of 71.1%, it is the highest performance for Gloucestershire since June 2021, and is a particularly important litmus indicator for children achieving good outcomes.

7.12. Children accommodated under Section 20 Children Act 1989 (voluntary agreement with parents) increased to from 19.5% to 20.5% by the end of the quarter, which is slightly above the national rate of 17%. In part this reflects an increase in the number of unaccompanied children Gloucestershire cares for.

7.13. Quarter 4 saw a slight increase in children entering care for a second or subsequent time within 12 months to 11.5%.

7.14. Timeliness of visits to children in care remained high at the end of March (95.6%) with performance being above target throughout the last two quarters.

- 7.15. Reviews were timely for the vast majority of children in care (98%), achieving a 12-month best.
- 7.16. The proportion of children in care who have had a missing episode within the last 12 months has followed a reducing trend over the last 12 months. This is down from a peak of 15.6% (131 children) in January 2022, to 11.8% (102 children) in December. This has been achieved during a period of growth in the overall cohort of children in care and is closing the gap between performance and our target which is set at the statistical neighbour average rate of 10%.
- 7.17. 25.1% of school aged children in care at the end of March were recorded as persistently absent from school this academic year (below 90%). This is the highest level of persistent absence of the past three academic years. This echoes but is more severe than the downturn in attendance for all children. Gloucestershire's Continuous Improvement Board has asked officers to undertake a deep dive into this area and are seeking recommendations that will drive improvement.

Specific to Care Leavers

- 7.18. At the end of Quarter 4, the proportion of care experienced young adults considered to be living in suitable accommodation improved for the second quarter, from 87.7% at the end of September 2022 to 91.9% at the end of March 2023 (all age groups). All age groups are within tolerance of target, with the highest performance for our 16-18-olds (93.8%).
- 7.19. 58.2% of care experienced young people are in education, employment, or training (EET) with performance best for 16–18-year-olds (62.1%). Performance for 19–21-year-olds is at a 12-month best (58.5% EET). Performance is worst for those aged over 21 years that we continue to support. 5.4% of care experienced adults are in Higher Education. This is worse than target (6.0%) but better than the peer group average (5.0%).
- 7.20. 82.7% of care experienced adults have an up-to-date pathway plan, below target and an area for focused improvement within the service. Investment in five additional personal adviser roles last year and five more this year, means that the service will be able to ensure timely allocation of a leaving care personal adviser and more timely completion of pathway Plans and Pathway Plan reviews.
- 7.21. 96.1% of care experienced adults over 21 years were seen within timescale, above target throughout the last two quarters. However, this rate reduces for those aged 16-20 years where only 77.5% were visited within timescales. (Required visiting timescales are different between the two groups).

Cllr Stephen Davies
Cabinet Member – Children's Safeguarding & Early Years