

Report to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board

25 March 2024

Subject:	Corporate Parenting Board 12-Month Update
Director:	Interim Director of Children and Education, Sally Giles Director of Quality & Performance Teodora Bot
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1 Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments on the developments made by the Corporate Parenting Board.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The purpose of the report is to provide a 12-month update for consideration regarding how services are supporting Sandwell children in care and care experienced young people.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>Corporate Parenting aims to give children in our care the best possible beginning in life and experiences by providing them with opportunities to fulfil their potential. This involves making sure that all children in our care, who consider Sandwell their “Corporate Parents,” grow up in stable homes, receive good quality care and have their needs prioritised and promoted. Supporting our young people as they transition into adulthood, through provision of services and assistance to help them thrive, and become independent, resilient young adults.</p>
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4 Context

Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) is co-chaired by the Elected Cabinet Member Councillor for Children and Education Services, and the Chairs of the Voice Of Sandwell (VOS - forum for 11-18-year old) and Forum for Independent Young Adults (FIYA - forum for 18-25 year old). This arrangement is in place to ensure the focus remains on key areas affecting our children in care and care experienced young people and provides them the opportunity to participate, influence and co-produce the delivery of services.

The Children & Social Care Act 2017 sets out 7 Corporate Parenting principles which are guidelines that Local Authorities and partners follow when providing services to children in care and care experienced young people: [The 7 Corporate Parenting Principle](#)

The Board has representation from Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC), Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT), Education, Skills, Employment and Training, Housing, Social Care, Foster Carers, children and young people, NHS/ICB, West Midlands Police, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Elected Members including the Leader of the opposition.

The Strategic Corporate Parenting Group (SCPG) is formed by Board officers and multiagency partners. Its purpose is to monitor, review, and address key areas affecting children and young people in the care of Sandwell Local Authority.

Focused areas include:

- The child and young person's voice
- Education
- Skills, Employments and Training
- Physical Health
- Emotional, Wellbeing and Mental health
- Access to Services
- Safeguarding, Fostering and Stability
- Preparation for adulthood.



During the reporting period, the Board has identified 5 key priorities:

- The education, employment and training of care experienced young people, age 19 years +
- Homes' sufficiency: the development and implementation of Foster Friendly Sandwell programme to aid with the recruitment and retention of highly skilled and able foster carers for our children in care; homes' stability
- Physical, emotional wellbeing and mental health provisions to support our children in care and care experienced young adults
- Access to Services: Local offer
- Enable elected members and partners to have a better understanding of their service areas and provide effective change.

5 What Is Working Well?

5.1 Governance and Development to the Board

In April 2023, the Local Government Association (LGA) and SMBC collaborated to provide Corporate Parenting training to Cabinet members, Elected members, and the CPB members. As a result, the CPB decided to revise its terms of reference to enhance governance, ensure appropriate partners' presence, and improve its effectiveness.

The updated terms of reference were reviewed and approved by the CPB and SCPG. In May 2023, the Annual Council officially endorsed the new terms of reference and as a result the CPB now meets every 10 weeks.

5.2 The Council Impact Assessment

In December 2022, the LGA facilitated Corporate Parenting training for the CPB. The training focused on identifying what the Board had in place to support Sandwell children in care, and care experienced young people and what further support can be put in place to raise the profile of Corporate Parenting in Sandwell.

In March 2023, SMBC Democratic Services confirmed that all report templates include Corporate Parenting as part of the implications



section. Report authors are now required to consider Corporate Parenting when writing reports that involve changes or decisions affecting children in care or care experienced young people.

5.3 Assistant Directors Workshop and Corporate Business Planning Sessions

Assistant Directors met during Corporate Parenting Week in June 2023 to discuss their role and how they can contribute towards the Corporate Parenting agenda. Subsequently, two additional meetings were organised to explore how services can support children in care and care experienced young people. The participation of young people who shared their personal journey had a significant impact. As a result, Corporate Parenting has now been identified as a key priority within the corporate business planning process.

In November 2023, Corporate Parenting presented at three business planning sessions. The aim was to encourage Assistant Directors to consider care experienced young people in their new corporate business plans. This involved identifying potential support through work experience, employment opportunities, and employment mentoring.

5.4 Corporate Parenting Week 2023

The first annual Sandwell Corporate Parenting Week took place from 12 June - 16 June 2023. As a partnership, SMBC, SCT, Black Country NHS Foundation and CAHMS colleagues celebrated the week to:

- Raise the profile of Corporate Parenting across partnerships.
- Ensure a clear understanding of what it means to be a Corporate Parent.
- Enable individuals to develop the confidence to be more effective Corporate Parents.

During the week, over 600 colleagues participated in a live virtual event led by a care-experienced young person who shared their journey through the care system. The week included webinars on trauma-informed care, Corporate Parenting training sessions for newly Elected Members, a workshop on developing a new Corporate Parenting



strategy, health awareness initiatives, education-focused discussions, and employment support.

Feedback throughout the week was positive, and there was clear learning across the Council, SCT, and partners. As a result, key actions have been identified for the next 12 months. Moving forward, Corporate Parenting Week will be held annually to continue raising awareness.

5.5 Care Experienced Week

The week took place between 25th October to 1st November 2023, it included various activities for young people. The Care Experienced Young People Awards Ceremony highlighted the ongoing work required in areas of apprenticeships, higher education, accommodation, and combating stigma associated with children in care and care experienced young people.

5.6 Corporate Parenting Board Deep Dives

Following a self-evaluation, the Board agreed an annual programme of meetings based on thematic deep dives. In October 2022, the first deep dive focused on the Physical, Emotional and Wellbeing, Mental Health and Life Story Work for children in our care. Children in Care and care experienced young people shared feedback through VOS and FIYA. Their concerns included medical, dental, and optician's prescription costs, access to their files to gain an understanding of their health history, and whether there is a fast-track process for children in care to access CAMHS.

The second deep dive explored into Education, Skills, Employment and Training. VOS and FIYA led the meeting, emphasising the need for better support tailored to individual children and young people. Young people face challenges when aiming to attend university, particularly related to the costs and emotional support required.

The Board acknowledged the strength and commitment Sandwell Virtual School have for our children and young people. It continues to provide ongoing support to ensure access to quality education and ensure each child can achieve their full potential. 88% of children in care attend an education setting that is 'good/outstanding' this is an increase of 8%



since 2020. Attendance of Sandwell children in care is at 93.96% which is higher than all children nationally (92.5% Autumn 2023). The percentage of children achieving 4+ in English and Maths has doubled since 2017 to 32% in 2023.

To ensure that a child's education is not disrupted, any required school moves must seek approval from Sandwell Childrens Trust Directors. It is identified that Early Years (EYS), good level of development (GLD) fell by 5%, whilst this pertained to 1 child. Of the 36 children in EYS 38% have SEND support or an EHCP.

The Board has requested a benchmark against other Local Authorities to identify how it can increase the support and provide an outstanding offer to children and young people.

The Skills, Employment and Training Team focussed on addressing the level of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) 19-21 years old. Whilst there is an emphasis on apprenticeships, work experience placements and supporting young people into education, employment and training (EET), there has only been a 1.8% increase in young people entering into formal education, employment or training since March 2023, this is slower than expected. It is highlighted that young people face barriers which impact their progress to enter employment. Young people identified social anxiety, PTSD, mental health and emotional wellbeing, placement stability and having limited social networks as being the main reasons to why they struggle.

In March 2023, the Board focussed on Stability and Safeguarding: The Journey of the Child. SCT presentation covered:

- Children in care services and care leaving service
- Independent Reviewing Officers
- Fostering Service
- Participation Service

The presentation highlighted the importance of placement stability, the need for additional foster care placements, support to maintain placements when they are at risk of disruptions, and the importance of



trusting relationships being developed between children, carers and the team around the child.

It was acknowledged that when children enter care, they experience loss and suffer some form of trauma, and appropriate access to timely emotional well-being support services is absolutely vital.

In response to the recognised need for services that support the emotional wellbeing of children in our care, SCPG pursued the initiative to create and develop an Emotional and Wellbeing Hub specifically for children who are currently in or have been in our care. This initiative led to the launch of the new Emotional Wellbeing Hub in January 2024, funded by the SMBC. Starting as a pilot and pathfinder project, it aims to offer support to children entering care, those in care, and care leavers by providing specialist assessment and intervention. The service is designed to complement and enhance the bespoke CAHMS provision that is already available to these children. The Hub is delivered by Barnardo's, being hosted and managed by the Trust. It is worth noting that the Pilot is funded until March 2025 and if successful, further consideration will need to be given in relation to the funding streams.

5.7 Voice of Children and Young People

VOS and FIYA forums continue to provide reports to CPB on work they undertake. During 2023 this included participation in Holiday Activities (Malt House Stables, Drayton Manor, barbeque afternoon, weekly sports sessions and employability workshops) which were funded by the HAF programme, parent consultations, drop-in sessions, presenting at SCT's AGM, developing and supporting the NHS redesign and House Project, FIYA Awards, and Care Leavers Week.

On 21 February 2024, Children and Education Services Scrutiny Board met with Sandwell VOS and FIYA for an engagement session. The session focused on children in care and young people presented what positive work is in place for them and what they hope will change in the future.



Children and young people were asked to identify areas they feel need more attention to improve their development and care experiences which include:

- Protective characteristics
- Policies are developed with children and young people at the centre
- Corporate parents to use loving language
- Being treated as children first and children in care second – they are children first.

5.8 Christmas Gifts

In December 2023, at the height of the cost of living crisis, SMBC, SCT and the Black Country NHS contributed £2020 to ensure current care experienced young people received a Christmas gift this holiday.

5.9 Webpages Update

Corporate Parenting intranet pages have been updated to provide comprehensive information about Corporate Parenting:

<https://intranet.sandwell.gov.uk/corporateparenting>

6 What Are We Worried About?

6.1 Local Offer

In 2022, the West Midlands ADCS developed a blueprint for a Local Offer aimed at care-experienced young people aged 16-25. Work has progressed for Sandwell's local offer, with some proposals being implemented using the existing resources and reconfiguration of services. However, several aspirations remain unachieved due to a shortage of necessary resources.

- Bridging the apprenticeship wage gap to the national living wage
- An increase to the care leavers university bursary
- Providing free eye tests and glasses
- Offering a birthday present and festival allowance
- Establishing a mentoring scheme

6.2 Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET)



While the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) figures increased to 1.8% for 19-21-year olds with care experience in March 2023, this continues to be a significant concern for the Board.

The Board conducted a review of the Not in Education, Employment, and Training (NEET) strategy and action plan. The primary focus was on identifying young people at risk, facilitating their transition to adulthood, offering specialised support, enhancing post-16 education, and expanding training and employment prospects. Additionally, ongoing efforts aim to improve opportunities and boost the participation of young individuals in education, employment, or training (EET).

6.3 Sufficiency of homes for our children in our care

It is well recognised that we are facing a national crisis regarding placement sufficiency within children's social care. The situation continues to impact directly on children whose needs are not fully met whilst in care, as well as the financial implications that arise because of insufficient suitable provision within the care market. We know care planning prior to care is critical and analysis tells us that children are entering care appropriately. Positively, analysis of practice has shown that more children are being prevented from entering care and as of April 2023, the rate of entrants into care was 20.4 per 10,000. This is lower than statistical neighbours (31.6), West Midlands (27) and England averages (26). There is more consistent and appropriate decision making when care is required; and for children in residential care, a more proactive approach is seeing some children step down into foster care. There may be limitations due to placement availability, but the commissioning and operational team are actively trying to reintegrate children into family living where possible. However, overwhelmingly the biggest factor is the lack of available and appropriate care placements to meet children's identified needs. This impacts significantly on the finances required because in many situations, there is no choice but to accept the only available placement, irrespective of cost and whether it is a suitable match.

To this extent, in addition to the involvement through the regional and regional forms, SMBC and SCT are working towards embarking on a



major project to - an integrated approach to care and engage partners and other stakeholders to achieve Fostering Friendly status for Sandwell.

6.4 Sustainability of Funding – Emotional and Well being Hub

There is continued concern with regards to the absence of recurrent funding to support the prevention emotional well-being, which is crucial for providing consistent early intervention support for those children who need it, but through the pilot programmes and evaluation of impact the services have had it is hoped that any savings can support a reinvest model.

7 Next Steps

7.1 Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027 is currently undergoing a refresh. Children, young people, and partners are co-producing this strategy. The finalised version will be reviewed and approved in the next financial year.

7.2 Local Offer

Cabinet Member for Children and Education Services, Cllr Simon Hackett, and Michael Jarrett (previous Director for Children and Education) have led on efforts relating to corporate sponsorship as part of our social value initiatives.

In February 2024, Michael Jarrett, met with UK Director and European Director for Infosys's UK to explore the possibility of their support for the Sandwell Local Offer aimed at care-experienced young people. This process will be continued by the Interim Director of Children and Education Services, Sally Gilles

7.3 NEET

As already alluded to, the Skills, Employment and Training Team presented a deep dive update into Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) at CPB in January 2024. It was identified that Sandwell youth unemployment is an issue affecting not only care experienced Young people but also their peers. The team is working closely with Elected Member for Children and Education Services to hold a Youth Employment Summit in Summer 2024.



Sandwell Social Value team continues to collaborate with local businesses and organisation to identify opportunities for Care Experienced Young People including Lovell and Sandwell Anchor Network. All identified opportunities are shared with the Skills, Employment and Training team who allocate it to a interested young person.

Think Sandwell will continue to complete monthly drop-in sessions at Metsec, this has been an opportunity to build relationships and understand the needs of individuals and provide support to prepare them for the world of work. Young people will also be able to access home visits if they are unable to attend the drop-in sessions. Short training courses have been utilised to build confidence in the workplace, become work ready, identifying interests and these have proved successful with 1 care leaver accessing an apprenticeship following completion.

Board members will visit Coventry Local Authority to meet with lead officers for Skills, Employment and Training team, the Participation team, and Virtual School. This is part of a partnership collaboration prompted by Coventry being identified as having an outstanding practices in the following areas.

Following the Assistant Directors business planning workshops, they have been asked to consider our care-experienced young people when writing their new corporate business plans. The aim is to identify how services could support our young people, whether this could be through providing work experience, employment opportunities, and employment mentoring.

7.4 Voice of Children and Young People

Children in care and care-experienced young people have identified their focus areas for 2024, which include ensuring the continuation of HAF funding, parent forum involvement, foster carer appreciation days, year-end celebrations, and a Christmas party.



7.5 Mandatory E-Training

Corporate Parenting Mandatory E-training is currently being developed and is due to be published in the new financial year. Corporate Parenting training will be delivered to the leadership team and all councillors during Corporate Parenting week: Monday 10 – 14th June 2024.

7.6 Protected Characteristics

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, led by Josh McCallister, put forward two key recommendations aimed at improving the well-being of individuals with care experience:

- The government should recognise care experience as a protected characteristic.
- New laws should be enacted to extend corporate parenting responsibilities to a broader range of public bodies and organisations.

While the UK government has not yet approved care experience as a protected characteristic, Local Authorities are taking action at a local level. Sandwell aims to join the 78 other Authorities that have already approved care experience as a protected characteristic with this process to be completed by June 2024.

8 Summary

The CPB acknowledges the progress made by the Council and partner agencies over the past year. However, it is recognising areas for improvement in supporting children in care and care experienced young people.

While positive changes have been made, the CPB will continue to focus on several key areas:

- NEET
- Health Assessments and Dental Care
- Preparation for Adulthood.
- Early Intervention for Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health
- Sufficiency of homes for our children in care



The Board has a clear plan for 2024, emphasising collaboration to meet the needs of our children and care-experienced young people.

9 Implications

Resources:	The nonrecurrent funding provides uncertainty and instability of delivery services and the ability to plan for long term programmes to make a sustained impact.
Legal and Governance:	n/a
Risk:	n/a
Equality:	Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments
Health and Wellbeing:	If the services are not provided, it could likely lead to negative effects on the health and wellbeing of our communities.
Social Value:	n/a
Climate Change:	n/a
Corporate Parenting:	Without targeted service, Children in care and care leavers are more likely than their peers to have poor life outcomes and struggle with their long-term physical, mental health and emotional wellbeing.

10 Background Papers

[Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020-2023](#)

[Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021 – 2023](#)

[Protective characteristics Report by Terry Galloway](#)

