

Committee/Date:	Full Council / 8 December 2022
Report Title:	Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report
Directorate:	Families
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Wards affected:	All
Public Access	Open
Appendices	Appendix 1 -Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021 - 2022

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1. This annual report provides an overview of the progress that has been made during 2021/22 against our priorities and highlights the Board's role in holding to account the services provided by the Council and our partners for our care experienced children.
- 1.2. The Corporate Parenting Board annual report for 2021-2022 is divided into the different service areas where the board maintain strategic oversight. It highlights achievements, challenges and upcoming areas of focus. The aim of the report is provide a collective view of how these services work together to support and make a different to our children in care and care experienced young adults.
- 1.3. The report highlights the increasing number of children coming into care as well as increasing number of care experienced young people. It draws attention to pressures on services and resources. It also highlights a whole service approach response in supporting our children and young people.
- 1.4. The report also highlights performance against the Board's key priorities for 2021-2022 including:-
 - Health
 - Social Care
 - Waltham Forest Housing Department
 - Virtual School
 - The Voice and Influence and the leaving care champion's role

2. WHAT'S NEXT/ LOOKING AHEAD TO 2022-2023

- 2.1 In addition to focuses outlined in each service area, the annual report also highlights the priority areas for next year based on national and local objectives.

2.2 Health

Improving health outcomes for our children remains a prime area of focus in order to improve statutory health assessments, which includes tackling the backlog and addressing the arising risks. This is being addressed through additional oversight and monitoring which is taking place via a joint Health and Social Care working group to specifically targets the timeliness and quality of the health assessments. Extra funding was unlocked through partnership working to help address backlog and enhance capacity. As a result agency staff are now employed to specifically clear the backlog and the Children looked after health team have successfully recruited to the vacant post which will support with the diminished capacity.

2.3 Voice and influence

Our children and young people have played and active role in the Corporate Parenting Board for some years now. We are planning to review the chairing arrangements to provide opportunities for our young people to co-chair the meetings and we are exploring a young person's charter as part of this.

2.4 Rising cost of living

This is predicted to have an adverse impact on our care experienced children and young people. It will also affect our carers and their ability to be able to offer the levels of care we need within the existing financial projections. Faced with this financial challenge, the financial sustainability challenge will become even more pronounced. We will endeavour to be innovative and creative in finding solutions to ensure that the best and most effective services possible for our children.

2.5 Sufficiency

We will be reviewing and refreshing our 3 year Sufficiency Strategy to ensure that we have enough of the right accommodation and services, in the right places, to effectively support our children and young people. In particular we are committed to meeting the needs of our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). With the expansion of our "threshold" to 0.1% of the Children's population, we remain committed to the ensuring all UASC children are in high quality alternative homes that are suited to their individual needs. Furthermore, we are enhancing our Virtual School offer to ensure the barrier to progress and attainment for children newly arrived are removed as swiftly as possible and these children's enormous potential is realised. We also now have 2 mockingbird constellations which is an important tool for supporting and retaining foster carers. Currently we are supporting 18 foster carers and 27 young people within the 2 mockingbird constellations, of the 27 young people 8 are UASC young people. We are working towards a third constellation by March 2023.

We will continue to have a robust oversight and focus on the small number of children under the age of 12 within residential accommodation.

Our focus next year will be to continue to attempt to grow our in-house Fostering capacity with challenging stretch targets and review our offer to Special Guardians.

2.6 Tackling discrimination and inequality

This will remain an underpinning feature of all the work we do, using our data to inform practice, tackle racial disparity and improve equity across all our services. For instance, in the work in education and mental wellbeing where we know that Black boys are more likely to be excluded and have difficulty

accessing appropriate local services. As part of our recruitment, we will focus on ensuring the demography of our carers is reflective of our children in care population.

2.7 Ofsted's framework for focused inspection looking at children leaving care

We will use the Ofsted inspection results of a neighbouring local authority's arrangements for care leavers to self-assess our own practice and find ways to improve how we support and empower our care experienced young people.

2.8 The Independent Review into Social Care

This review sets out the need for a radical whole system reset and recognises that it is loving relationships that hold the solutions for children and families overcoming adversity. It calls for a system that provides intensive help to families in crisis, unlocks the potential of wider family networks to raise children, puts lifelong loving relationships at the heart of the care system and lays the foundations for a good life for those who have been in care. This has significant implications for our Corporate Parenting Services with recommendations that include

- replacing independent reviewing officers with advocates
- the creation of regional care cooperatives to commission foster care, residential children's homes, secure estate
- greater involvement and support of wider family – legal advice and financial support for kinship carers
- making care experience a protected characteristic
- requirements for registered social workers to spend 100 hours each year in direct practice

2.9 National review into children with disabilities and complex health needs placed in residential settings

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel is undertaking a national review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings and Directors of Children Services (DCS) are required to take action to carry out reviews into all children in their care who meet the criteria, liaising with other boroughs where children may be placed. Although we have no settings that meet these criteria in borough, we will also be looking through this lens at our in-house provision at Leyton Green Road. This is accommodation that provides residential and short breaks for our children with learning disabilities and our long stay, 3 bedded unit has been at full occupancy since March 2021. The findings from these reviews will be shared in our report next year.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1. Council is asked to note the progress made and endorse the priorities for next financial year.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1. Experience and research have shown that care experienced children achieve poorer outcomes than their peers. In Waltham Forest our response to this is to ensure that services continue to work innovatively and collaboratively to identify and address the additional barriers that children in care and care experienced young people face to enable our children to achieve better

outcomes. It is crucial that, as corporate parents, the Council and its partners scrutinise these services and ensure they promote high aspirations and achieve outstanding outcomes for our children and young people in care and care experienced adults.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1. In conclusion, the report shows the substantial work that has been undertaken in 2021/2022 to improve outcomes for care experienced and care leavers.
- 5.2. As corporate parents the council has worked hard to sustain high level of level of support to children in care and care experienced young people in the most difficult period of our time. It is therefore important to acknowledge the work of the staff, partners, foster cares, alternative home providers and the adopters that continue to keep our children safe and well, enabling them to learn and develop through different stages of life.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There is risk to children and young people as well as a reputational risk to the Council if it does not successfully fulfil its corporate parenting function. A strong corporate parenting function is an essential safeguard for the quality of care of children looked after by the local authority.
- 6.2. Robust corporate parenting protocols are embedded and reinforced within the service, the workforce have great understanding of the role and relevance of the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 6.3. Rising cost of living has placed pressures on services, both nationally and locally and will need to be recognised in budgetary allocations. It is also having a significant impact on our workforce.
- 6.4. Demand for corporate parenting services has seen its biggest increase this year and ensuring high quality, equitable and safe services has remained essential for the Board. Across the corporate system, Fair Deal and recovery plans have helped us to learn and innovate and the services continue to explore different creative ways to meet demands.

7. FINANCE, VALUE FOR MONEY AND RISK

- 7.1 Legal The term 'corporate parenting' is the term used to describe the responsibility of the local authority towards 'looked after' children and young people. This is the legal responsibility given to local authorities by the Children Act 1989 and 2004 and the Children and Young Persons Act 2008. The duty is owed not only to those who are subject to care orders and therefore the local authority share parental responsibility with the parents, but to all children who are looked after by the local authority. As a corporate parent the duty is owed by the Council as a whole, particularly elected Members, to ensure good outcomes for looked after children are achieved for every individual child and young person.

8 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY

- 8.1 The continued strengthening of the corporate parenting function in Waltham Forest as outlined in the Annual Report 2021/2022 continues to have a positive impact on outcomes for children in care and young people. Furthermore, by strengthening the Council as a corporate parent, Councillors and officers are more mindful of how decisions made across the organisation can potentially impact on children in care.

9 SUSTAINABILITY (INCLUDING CLIMATE CHANGE, HEALTH, CRIME AND DISORDER)

- 9.1 The Corporate Parenting Board provides the Council and its partners with a dedicated mechanism to monitor indicators such as health, crime and educational attainment rates of looked after children. It is expected that these changes will have a positive impact on sustainability in Waltham Forest.

10 COUNCIL INFRASTRUCTURE (E.G HUMAN RESOURCES, ACCOMODATION OR IT ISSUES)

- 10.1 There are no background papers for this report which require listing.