

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Committee:	Corporate Parenting Board
Date:	15 June 2022
Title:	Corporate Parenting Board Progress Update
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Children and Young People Select Committee on the progress made against the priority actions identified in the OFSTED inspection that took place in 2019, where we were judged to be Outstanding. The report also includes an update on the progress made to improve and develop the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process.

Recommendation(s)

2. That the Children and Young People Select Committee note the contents of this report and the positive progress made in respect of the Ofsted recommendation.

Executive Summary

3. This report seeks to update the Committee on the progress made against the work that has been completed to further progress and improve the purpose and impact of the Corporate Parenting Board. This was identified as an area for development in the most recent full Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), Ofsted inspection (2019).
4. The 2019 inspection judged the authority to be Outstanding across all domains, one of the first in the country. They found that "Children in care benefit from high quality support, which is making a real difference to their outcomes" (Ofsted April 2019). Only two areas were identified as areas needing to improve.
 - The proportion of children who are offered, and take up, a return home interview when they have been missing from home or care.
 - The Corporate Parenting Board's rigour in holding partners, including health providers and district councils, to account to ensure that they prioritise services for children and young people more effectively.

5. The department took immediate steps to reflect on the findings in the report, and the arrangements in place at that time for the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB). The CPB was sitting as a subgroup of the Children and Families Advisory Panel (CFAP). It had been established for two years, and it was acknowledged that there were opportunities to further develop and mature the CPB.
6. On 13 February 2020, the County Council agreed the new Terms of Reference and structure for the Corporate Parenting Board. The CPB became a full committee of the County Council which may advise the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services. This enhanced the CPB's standing and emphasised the importance of members oversight of Children in Care.
7. The reconstituted CPB has established itself as having a key role in holding the department and partner agencies to account and ensuring that Children in Care are offered a high-quality service. These changes and developments have helped the CPB to mature and to become more effective in meeting its purpose.
8. In addition to work completed at board meetings, CPB members have participated in engagement sessions which have ranged from visiting children in care at their placements, attending formal meetings with and about children in care, and attending training on the health needs of children in care. These activities have enhanced the CPB's overall understanding of the needs and experiences of children in care. The Chairman ensures that these activities are discussed at every board meeting and encourages members to prioritise attending as many as they can.
9. The 2019 Ofsted inspection made positive findings about Personal Education Plans (PEPs). The department has a strong ethos of continuous improvement and transformation. Notwithstanding these positive findings, the department noted opportunities to further review and make changes to the PEP process to improve the quality and the impact they have on the educational attainment for children in care.
10. The Transforming Social Care Programme undertook a full review of the PEP process in collaboration with the Virtual School and education partners. The recommendations of the review are still being considered. One of the key changes suggested by education partners is a move to an electronic PEP, which make the process more streamlined and easier to monitor. Work is underway to review the options for this.
11. Alongside this, the Virtual School has reviewed the training and support that is on offer to social workers and partner agencies. In addition, the management of the Virtual School Head has recently changed to be undertaken jointly by the Area Director in Children and Families with the

Strategic Lead for Children in Care, as well as the current line manager who is the County Manager for Inclusion within the Education and Inclusion Branch. This change is to ensure that there is cross branch working to ensure the needs of children in care and their education are paramount.

Contextual information

12. In April 2019 Ofsted undertook an inspection of HCC Childrens Services and judged the service to be Outstanding across all domains. There were only two recommendations for improvement, one of which was with regards to the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) -

“The Corporate Parenting Board’s rigour in holding partners, including health providers and district councils, to account to ensure that they prioritise services for children and young people more effectively.”

13. This is further expanded in the body of the report as follows –

“The corporate parenting board effectively seeks to build a well-informed understanding of the experiences, concerns and achievements of children in care. The board is energetic in taking steps to ensure that all children receive good services. The board’s ongoing engagement with children is an essential, primary focus of its work and is gained through a wide variety of sources, including the involvement of an expanding number of children in care, engaged as care ambassadors.

The board has not extended its membership to include partner agencies due to concerns about the impact this might have on the engagement of children in care and care leavers. While the board effectively scrutinises all the important areas of services for children in care, it does not have a systematic way of ensuring consistent collaboration with key partners, such as health services, district councils or foster carers. This dilutes its ability to ensure a joined-up response to areas for development, such as ensuring timely health assessments and delivering a more consistent approach to council tax exemption for care leavers.”

14. The Children and Families Advisory Panel was invited to consider recommending to Full Council making the CPB a committee in its own right. This revised structure emphasised the importance of children in care and care leavers within Hampshire and would give the CPB more authority to hold partners to account.
15. In reaching this decision the County Council increased membership from three elected members to nine. Care Ambassadors (former children in care) were no longer co-opted members, but they and other care experienced young people would be invited to attend as necessary.

16. Terms of Reference and membership of the new board were agreed, in line with the proposed changes outlined above, at a full County Council meeting on 13 February 2020.
17. The terms of reference of the board allows the CPB to ensure that all the services provided to Children in Care and Care Leavers are of a high standard, and ensure that Children in Care and Care Leavers are well supported in all aspects of their life, including
 - Support and encouragement to achieve in school.
 - Support to maintain good mental health and wellbeing.
 - Having opportunities for positive social integration; and
 - Enabling the most vulnerable children and young people in society to flourish into the successful adults they can become.
18. To reflect the greater emphasis on multi-agency engagement and holding partner agencies to account, the agenda now includes items from key partner agencies who provide services to support these outcomes. Those partners are required to provide a full written report and attend the Board to be held to account for the content of those reports and respond to questions and challenge where appropriate.
19. The CPB has used its position to influence policy beyond the County Council, for the benefit of Children in Care and Care Leavers. The CPB has supported the decision of districts to offer significant discounts or a full waiver in Council Tax for Care Leavers. Eight districts offer specific discounts for Care Leavers. The remaining three districts offer discounts that can be accessed by Care Leavers alongside other eligible people.
20. A summary of agenda items considered by the current board is as follows –

October 2020

Children's social care – response to Covid and the impact going forward
Big Activity Week 2020 (these are residential trips for Children in Care in school years 4-9, focusing on fun and physical activities)
Virtual School Update

January 2021

Modernising Placement Programme
Annual Care Leavers report
Annual Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) report
Annual fostering report

June 2021

Protocol on the working arrangements between the Hampshire Corporate Parenting Board and the Hampshire Safeguarding Children Partnership
Annual report for Children in Care
Annual report from Health
Annual report from Police

October 2021

Independent Reviewing Service Care Plan Audit

Big Activity Week 2021

Annual Report from the Virtual School

Update on Health Assessments

Update on Modernising Placements Programme

21. Members of the CPB have participated in regular engagement sessions to support them in gaining insight into the needs of Children in Care. These engagement sessions have included –
 - Attending the Big Activity Week. These are residential trips for Children in Care in school years 4-9, focusing on fun and physical activities.
 - Attending Care Ambassadors meetings. Care Ambassadors was a forum of primarily Care Leavers who represented the views of Children in Care and Care Leavers.
 - Attending foster care support groups.
 - Sitting on the judging panel for We've Got Talent in 2020 and 2021. This was a virtual event, run during the pandemic, where children in care and care leavers were invited to submit entries to a talent contest.
 - Participating in the tender process for post 16 accommodation.
 - Joining inspection teams for post-16 accommodation.
 - Meeting with children and families at their foster placements, and at their family homes. This has included children in long term placements and families working towards their children returning to their care.
 - Meeting with Independent Reviewing Officers.
 - Visiting Hampshire's residential homes and Swanwick Lodge (Secure unit).
 - A Children in Care health training session, run by Children in Care health colleagues.

22. CPB members provide written feedback following engagement sessions which is considered and acted on where appropriate. The feedback received indicates that CPB members find these visits to be helpful and informative to their role. These activities help CPB members to have a broader understanding of the needs and experiences of Children in Care, and the quality of the services provided to them.

23. Some of this feedback includes suggestions for further service developments. For example, suggestions have included improvements that could be made to the Virtual College, to bring the support more in line with that offered to children by the Virtual School. Advisors from the Virtual College now attend Year 11 PEPs to support transitions.

24. At this current time, children's voices are present at the CPB through inclusion in reports presented by agencies, and through the findings of the Bright Spots survey (this is a survey run by Coram Voice, in which all Children in Care in Hampshire are invited to give their views on their experiences of being in care, the findings of which are used to inform service delivery). The department has recently written the participation strategy for the Department;

this includes work to form a Children in Care Council which will be able to have greater input into the CPB. This work is in progress and further updates will be provided where appropriate. It is anticipated that the Council will be ready to launch in autumn 2022. Children in care bring invaluable perspectives to discussions about the services and issues that will affect them, and we look forward to their enhanced input at CPB meetings.

25. CPB members are expected to use their knowledge and position to ensure that the Council upholds its responsibilities as corporate parents in all their roles and functions as elected members. The department receives a consistent level of queries from elected members usually relating to individual case queries, raised by members of the public. These are addressed and resolved using communication processes in place to manage these, and, to date, there have been no occasions where elected members have considered it necessary to escalate these matters further, or where concerns relate to systemic concerns about the department. This reflects a healthy level of challenge by CPB members and, by extension, wider elected members.
26. In October 2021, the Chairman advised the CPB that she had been contacted by Middlesbrough Council, seeking advice about developing the Corporate Parenting approach in Middlesbrough. This suggests that the CPB in Hampshire has a positive reputation and provides an example of good practice that other authorities can benefit from.
27. CPB provides scrutiny of key programmes within the department. For example, the CPB has asked for additional reports in relation to the Modernising Placements Programme at regular intervals, to monitor progress and impact.

PEPs

28. The delivery of a high-quality personal education plan (PEP) is a key tool for promoting the educational outcomes of children in care. The PEP should cover the full range of education and development needs, outline the appropriate provision and set out the support in place for each child including the out of school hours learning. The PEP should clearly identify short- and long-term targets, actions and timescales which will drive forward educational improvement and should set out how the Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) will be used to support children's educational attainment and progress.
29. The Virtual School has a quality assurance role in relation to PEPs and must ensure they are effective, high quality and that the local authority has in place systems and arrangements to ensure they are delivered and reviewed within statutory timeframes. The Virtual School reports to the CPB on progress and developments accordingly.
30. In June 2021 The VSH was involved in a PEP review project as a joint initiative between Children and Families and Education and Inclusion branches which was delivered by Children's Services Transformation Practice

(TSC). The project included a rapid stakeholder engagement exercise, interviews with 15 designated teachers across all settings, focus groups with colleagues from social care, education, DAIT, HIEPs and foster carers and a survey with 279 responses, including over 160 school and 65 foster carer responses. This helped to identify the key areas of improvement and the short- and long-term actions required across the multi-agency partnership, including by the Virtual School.

31. As a result of the project the Virtual School increased our offer of statutory training to designated teachers to twice termly and has introduced a follow up session specifically on writing an effective PEP to ensure we continue to strengthen practice in this area. In addition, we have planned to deliver 'lite bite' training sessions across all social work districts and will be included in the induction e-learning programme for new social work staff. The VSH has commissioned more dedicated time for the school improvement service to enable more PEP auditing and feedback to schools to be undertaken as part of our 'Corporate Parent' visits to schools.

Finance

32. There are no finance implications or considerations.

Performance

33. There are no performance implications or consideration.

Consultation and Equalities

34. No consultation has been required.

Climate Change Impact Assessment

35. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience impacts of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.

36. Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation.

The carbon mitigation tool and climate change adaptation tool were not applicable because this report is a progress report, it is strategic in nature and the tools are neither required nor appropriate.

37. Carbon Mitigation

The carbon mitigation tool and climate change adaptation tool were not applicable because this report is a progress report, it is strategic in nature and the tools are neither required nor appropriate.

Other Key Issues

38. No other key issues identified.

Any other headings (if required)

39. No other headings required.

Conclusions

40. The department will always strive to work with partners to be strong corporate parents. The CPB is a key part of the structure that facilitates this.
41. Restructuring the CPB and expanding the membership has served to provide a more robust forum for mutual challenge and accountability. The CPB agenda has had oversight of a range of issues, including reports from multi agency partners who have a key role in making sure that Children in Care are happy, healthy, and provided with opportunities achieve their potential. Board members use the meeting to challenge the progress made by multi agency partners to better support Children in Care to meet their potential. There is tangible evidence of positive change to service delivery directly attributable to the interventions of Board members, which has been outlined in more detail in this report.
42. Moving forward, a key priority will be to provide more opportunities for children's voices to be present and for them to have input into decision-making within the CPB. As well as the existing opportunities for this to happen through reports that are brought to the board by agencies, the creation of the Children in Care Council will facilitate more direct involvement, including attendance at CPB meetings.
43. Work to improve the PEP process began from a position of strength, and it is anticipated that the plan of work in place will further develop this into an even more effective process that will continue to improve the education outcomes for children in care. The CPB will be updated about the progress of this work as it develops.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	No
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	No
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	Yes
OR	
This proposal does not link to the Strategic Plan but, nevertheless, requires a decision because:	

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents	
<p>The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

See guidance at <https://hants.sharepoint.com/sites/ID/SitePages/Equality-Impact-Assessments.aspx?web=1>

Insert in full your **Equality Statement** which will either state:

- why you consider that the project/proposal will have a low or no impact on groups with protected characteristics or*
- will give details of the identified impacts and potential mitigating actions*