



<u>Committee and Date</u>
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<u>Item</u>
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CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2021- MARCH 2022

Responsible Officer

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1. Synopsis

- 1.1. During 2021-2022 the Corporate Parenting Board and lead member for Children have supported the Children and Safeguarding Service and wider Council in achieving a 'GOOD' outcome from the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Services (ILACS) in February 2022.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 In our Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in February 2022 we were assessed as delivering a GOOD service for our looked after children and care leavers. Ofsted praised the dedication and commitment of the staff and the Council for the investment in our children and young people looked after.
- 2.2 Ofsted Inspectors endorsed our own self-assessment, demonstrating that we know ourselves well. We know what we need to do to improve and aim to become OUTSTANDING.
- 2.3 Areas of good and outstanding practice for children looked after and care leavers identified included that:
 - Children are listened to and included in plans about them. They are encouraged to make lifelong links.
 - Our improved tracking and initiatives to ensure children can live in a permanent safe, and stable home throughout their childhood and beyond.

- Increase in the number of children who have ceased to need to be looked after either through return to their birth parent, or to be with a connected family member or carer through Special Guardianship, or to be adopted by another family;
- The majority of children who needed to remain looked after in 2021-2022 were able to live in stable and safe homes with only a small number experiencing 3 or more moves;
- The Virtual School was instrumental in preventing exclusions of looked after children and improved the quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPs). There remains a higher proportion of our children looked after with Education, Health & Social Care Plans (EHCPs) than in the general child population of Shropshire.
- Most children have their annual health checks in timescale and our care leavers are all offered a 'Health Passport'.
- The Independent Reviewing Service has good oversight of children looked after.
- Young people who are care leavers get on well with their Personal Advisors and are helping to shape service developments.

2.4 Key issues and challenges included that:

- There had been a continued growth in our children looked after and care leavers. population between April 2021 and end of March 2022.
- In terms of numbers and rates of children looked after, Shropshire is above the national average and statistical comparators as at end March 2022. Forecasting ahead - there had continued to be an increase in the number of children looked after since end March 2022 although this is at a slower rate and includes an increased number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people;
- The impact of Covid continued to be felt through 2021-22 in terms of stress on families leading to injuries to children, neglect and family breakdown, alongside ongoing Court delays in making decisions about children's plans for their future.
- Our approach with families where there are safeguarding concerns needs to be more restorative to reduce risks and increase safety factors to enable more children to remain at home without state intervention.
- The introduction of the Government National Transfer Scheme to enable all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to be looked after arriving at ports by boat has had an ongoing impact on our numbers.
- The low return rate of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs), (a way of asking carers to feedback about the emotional well being of children they care for) challenges in collating data from the mental health services, and lack of suitable local services for children and young people experiencing emotional and mental health difficulties remains a challenge, impacting on our ability to fully understand and address the emotional wellbeing of all our children looked after.

- 2.5 The Local Authority is a learning organisation and seeks continuous improvement for services and outcomes for Looked After Children. The increase in the number of children needing to be looked after poses significant challenges in terms of improving outcomes for children looked, most importantly, in ensuring children experience stability and are supported to achieve timely permanence.
- 2.6 The development of Stepping Stones, the revised Public Law Outline pathway and the revised Special Guardianship Support offer have been reported to the Corporate Parenting Board as integral to supporting more families to care for their children without the need for undue state intervention through becoming or remaining looked after.
- 2.7 We are working closely with health partners to address the pathways for the emotional and mental health needs of children and young people to be identified early and timely interventions put in place. Our Early Help offer is also being revised to ensure families can receive the right support at the right time, preventing higher levels of need.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Members to approve the Annual Corporate Parenting Report for 2021-2022.

REPORT

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

(NB This will include the following: Impact on Children and Vulnerable Adults, Risk Management, Human Rights, Equalities, Community and other Consultation)

4.1. Risks

- 4.2. The growth in number of children needing to be looked after has an impact on the availability of suitable homes and carers to look after the children and meet their needs, especially locally. This is exacerbated by a national shortage of foster carers and suitable provision.

- 4.3. Children may have to be placed further away from their home, impacting adversely on their family time with birth parents, extended family and friends.
- 4.4. The challenge of sourcing the right support for children looked after impacts adversely on their mental and emotional health through to adulthood, and this can make it harder to ensure they can live locally and with carers who can meet their needs.
- 4.5. The lack of a base for care leavers to meet impacts on their ability to form friendships and alliances with other care leavers and to participate face to face in activities and information events that support their preparation for adulthood.
- 4.6. **Opportunities**
- 4.7. The growth in 'Stepping Stones' will provide for more children to remain within their birth families, and be returned more quickly and safely to the care of their birth families should they need to be looked after.
- 4.8. The restorative approach using the Public Law Outline should reduce the need for legal intervention.
- 4.9. The new Kinship Team should enable more connected carers to look after children in their own family with the right support, whilst reducing the need for unnecessary statutory intervention.
- 4.10. The development of the 'crisis mental health pathway' and earlier access to mental health resources jointly with health partners provides an opportunity to support children 'on the edge of care' and who have become looked after where their past trauma impacts on their mental and emotional health.
- 4.11. The new residential home for 16/17 year olds will enable at least 4 young people who need additional support, at any one time, to live locally and be guided and prepared for adult life.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. The cost of providing care and support for the increased number of children looked after will increase the financial spend of the Council as this is a statutory duty.
- 5.2. Whilst the emotional and mental health needs of children looked after are being met, this is at a cost to the Council until the pathways to access services via health resources can be resolved with health partners.

- 5.3. The statutory duties of the local authority towards children and young people and care leavers need to be carried out and this will have implications for staffing numbers in terms of qualified social workers, family time workers, fostering and adoption services, and independent reviewing officers.
- 5.4. The Stepping Stones initiative is aimed at spending resources to save in the longer term. This has been the case in 2021/22.
- 5.5. The government provides recompense to the local authority that covers the care costs for asylum-seeking children. However, the recompense for care leavers who are former asylum-seeking children does not always cover their support costs as many have delays in the Home Office granting 'leave to remain' status. This impacts on their right to work or claim any benefits.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. There are no direct implications arising from this report in respect of climate change.
- 6.2. However, there are opportunities to educate our children looked after and care leavers and those caring for them on the impact of climate change and how they can make changes in their own lives and access any support available to make such changes in terms of their accommodation or lifestyle.
- 6.3. The Council could consider what resources and advice may be made available to carers of children looked after and their carers, and care leavers in this respect.
- 6.4. There is an impact on fuel costs for families and social care staff visiting children placed at a distance.

7. Background

- 7.1. All local authorities have statutory duties to children looked after and care leavers, and towards children who have previously been looked after and are now adopted or subject to Special Guardianship.
- 7.2. These duties are laid out in legislation-mainly the Children Act 1989; Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010; Children and Young Persons' Act 2008; Children and Families Act 2014
- 7.3. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 sets out the Corporate Parenting Duties of all local authorities to the children and young

people in their care, including the seven Corporate Parenting principles.

- 7.4. Local authorities also have a statutory duty to promote the education of children looked after.
- 7.5. Partner agencies and professionals also have a duty to work in partnership with the local authority to promote the health and wellbeing of children looked after and meet their corporate parenting duty. This includes health, housing, police, probation, and youth offending services.

8. Additional Information

- 8.1. The Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2021-22 (inc. Appendices 1,2 and 3) should be read in conjunction with the Annual Reports in respect of Fostering, Adoption and the Independent Reviewing Service.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. The local authority services to our children and young people looked after and our care leavers are demonstrated to have been GOOD in 2021-22.
- 9.2. There are increased financial and resource implications, as set out in section 5, arising from the number of children looked after and who will be eligible to be supported as care leavers where the local authority has a statutory duty.
- 9.3. Steps are in place to enable more children to remain or return to the care of their family and local community.
- 9.4. There is an active partnership and plans in place to work with health partners for the pathways for children looked after to be able to access the right mental health support at the right time.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Cllr Kirstie Hurst-Knight

Local Member

All Members

Appendices

Appendix A – Shropshire Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021-2022
(with its appendices 1, 2 and 3)