

Committee/Date:	Council - Thursday 14 th December 2023
Report Title:	Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022/2023
Directorate:	People
Contact Details	Daniel Phelps: Director for Children Social Care
Wards affected:	All
Public Access	Open
Appendices	A - Corporate Parenting Board annual report 2022/2023 B - Corporate Parenting Board Strategy 2022/2023

SUMMARY

1. This annual report provides an overview of work that took place across the different Corporate Parenting Services from April 2022 – March 2023 to ensure that our children in care and care experienced young adults were kept safe and well and had every opportunity to flourish. It also describes the Board's role in holding to account the services provided by the Council and it's partners for our care experienced children.
 - 1.1. The report is divided up into the different service areas comprising Corporate Parenting, summarising the achievements, challenges, and upcoming areas of focus for each. It aims to provide a collective view of how these services worked together to support and make a difference to our children.
 - 1.2. This report has informed the 2023/24 Corporate Parenting Strategy and it is recommended that these two documents are read alongside each other.
 - 1.3. The Corporate Parenting Board makes sure the whole council and relevant partner agencies commit to excellent standards of service and support, to deliver the pledge to children in care, and to develop and carry out what the Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out to do. As Corporate Parents, the London Borough of Waltham Forest is committed to supporting our care

experienced children to be ambitious and aspirational in life, to stay safe and healthy and to go on to live fulfilling and successful adult lives. We want to help our children and young people to believe that anything is possible and to enjoy stable and permanent relationships with significant adults and people in their lives.

- 1.4. The corporate parenting service is responsible for 338 children in care and 407 care experienced young adults including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people.
- 1.5. There were a total number of Six Corporate Parenting Board meetings in 2022-23, the board covered a range of key themes (highlighted in the report). Each meeting took specific focus at performance across all services and provided appropriate level challenges for areas requiring improvement for example Health outcomes and data. Furthermore, Young peoples' workshops are well embedded in the process, ahead of each meeting ensuring that young people and children's views are gathered to help direct and inform CPB discussions, and ensure our children's 'place at the table'.
- 1.6. The voice and influence continues to play a vital role in making sure that young people in care and care experienced adults feel listened to and supported through the activities facilitated by the service.
- 1.7. 2022/2023 annual report highlights substantial work undertaken to improve outcomes for children in care and care experienced young people. The report highlights 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 most vulnerable children and young people. Of notable interest is the response to the cost-of-living crisis for foster carers and Special Guardianships carers which saw the fostering allowance increasing by 1.75% to help foster carers and special guardians who would have otherwise struggled financially.

The report also highlights key priorities for CPB for 2022-2023 and how each priority area was addressed by both the Corporate Parenting Board and each service area. It provides a reassuring picture of the level of creativity and engagement between the CPB and young people.

- 1.8. Below are some of the highlights of the CPB annual report:

- 1.9. **Adoption**

Coram has a national brief to supply adopters and arrange child placements. They are commissioned by the London Borough of Harrow to deliver the services of a regional adoption agency (RAA) for participating local authorities which includes Waltham Forest alongside Harrow, Bromley, City of London, Hillingdon, Redbridge, Slough, and the Bi-Borough [Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster City Council]. Nationally, there are fewer children exiting care and achieving permanence through adoption year on year, with more approved adopters than there are children to place. Less children are exiting care through adoption in London compared to anywhere else in England. However, when looking at current Waltham Forest data for children subject to plans for Adoption or are subject of Placement Orders it is likely that there will be an increase in the number of children exiting care through adoption in 2023/24

For 2022/2023, 4 children were adopted and 4 placed for adoption including 2 early permanence arrangements. Our adoption scorecard also improved from the previous 3 years.

1.10. Fostering

Our children have a sense of belonging and stability

- Two additional Mockingbird Constellations had been launched by March 2023, increasing the Mockingbird family to three, which now comprises over 30 children
- The Mockingbird has also offered children the opportunity to have respite, which helps maintain stable homes, built on love, in line with the care review reforms. However, there is still the need to recruit more foster carers to help meet the needs of our children and young people in care and meet the sufficiency needs of the council.

Our children are cared for by people they know and love

- During 2022 – 23 the number of special guardians increased by nine and there was a total of 14 special guardianship orders made. 21 temporary approvals were made for family and friends carers and 11 carers were approved under connected persons arrangements. This meant that 68 children have been able to be cared for by those they know and love.

1.11. Health

We continue to improve on meeting our children's emotional and physical health needs

Generally speaking, health performance received a lot of scrutiny and attention from the board in 2022-2023 due to previously reported poor health performance data and this has contributed to continuing improvement of health outcomes for children and young people.

The Corporate Parenting Board excised detailed oversight of performance of Initial Health Assessments (IHA) and Review Health Assessments (RHA), Dental health checks through regular update from the designated nurse at each board meeting.

Whilst at the service level, weekly joint meetings between health delivery partners and children's social care provided oversight of IHA and RHA performance. Last year, a significant backlog of RHAs was cleared; the annual reviews for these children and young people are now due and extra staff were recruited to help cover this annual surge in numbers. As at March 2023, 88.16% of children looked after for at least a year had a review health assessment within the last 12 months. High levels of oversight have been effective in improving RHA performance.

However, performance on initial health assessment remains an area of concern, at the end of March 2023, 35.7% of children becoming looked after receiving an initial health assessment within 28 days. Operational challenges include issues with interpreting services (currently under escalation), waiting lists for children placed out of borough and administrative errors..

The proportion of children in care who have had an oral assessment within the last 12 months has increased. NHS England recently moved responsibility for the secondary, community and specialist dental contracts to Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the team now sit within the Northeast London (NEL) ICB; this is a London-wide service. The dental pathway created for children in care during COVID was stood down due to not being utilised; the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children has worked with NEL ICB and the regional lead and agreed to relaunch the pathway. In March 2023, 86.4% of children in care had an up-to-date dental assessment.

In March 2023, 58.77% of children looked after for at least year had up-to-date immunisations. This is a marked improvement from previous year performance (55%). Work between children's social care and health continues to unpick issues around the recording of immunisations and information sharing between the two systems but this significant improvement in performance is a consequence of collaborative work between children's social care and health. The board will continue to hold Health services accountable to ensure improvement of health outcomes for children and young people over is achieved over the next year

1.12. Education

Children's needs are at the heart of all that's done, and a change of home does not mean a change of school. Virtual schools have introduced use of the 'Curious Personal Education Plan (PEP)' and have worked to embed innovative approaches to PEP Meetings. They have established a rolling programme of training for schools, social workers, and foster carers to fully equip them to participate in a meeting that is totally focussed on the child, which has resulted in purposeful discussions. Children are at the heart of this and have a safe space to express themselves and challenge the people around them, which gives them confidence they'll get the best support.

100% of children of Statutory School Age had an up-to-date Personal Education Plan (PEP) at the end of the 2022/23 academic year. The 'Curious PEP' approach allows meetings to be personalised to each child and act as an evolving record of their educational lives. Language that Cares training for Designated Teachers has been rolled out with a goal that all children's PEPs will be completed using Language that Cares by the end of the 2023/24 academic year.

Children's attendance at school is a key priority for the 2023/24 academic year, with the Multi-Agency Attendance Forum impacting across social care practice. The Virtual School has designed an Attendance Strategy in partnership with the BACME team, which will be launched across children's social care in October 2023. A monthly cross-service strategic shared intelligence group focusing on children who are persistently absent will be chaired by the Virtual School Headteacher.

88% of children in care attend schools rated by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding, with 12% attending schools which Require Improvement. When a school's judgement is downgraded, risk assessments are carried out and decisions are made in children's best interests, with additional support put in place where necessary so that children can remain within their school communities ensuring that established relationships are nurtured.

LBWF have 65 young people attending college, 32 young people in further education/specialist provisions and 32 young people attending universities. Additional to these, we have one young person who is due to undertake University Apprenticeship in Police and another undertaking Apprenticeship in Construction in September 2023.

1.13. Support for Care Experienced young adults

For 2022/2023 the board noted good collaborative working mechanisms across services and departments for example, Probation, DWP, Revenue and Benefits, LBWF Housing service, Homeless

Person's Unit Service, Rent Areas teams, Adult mental health services, primary mental health and citizens advice bureau working together to ensure the needs of care experienced people are robustly met through the services they each provide for young people. Some further the key themes noted throughout the year include the following

- good access to the Leaving care Hub which continues to provide young people with a space to socialise with their peer, build and develop positive supportive relationships whilst harnessing opportunities for learning and skills development.
- young people continue to be supported with council tax rebate up until 25th birthday, free leisure pass, free prescription, travel discount and robust housing allocation when they are ready to live independently.

92% of our care experienced young people are in touch with their leaving care coaches which demonstrates that they feel heard and supported. Furthermore, in the latest feedback from our young people, everyone who responded said that they were happy with the relationship they have with their leaving care coach. The majority of our young people feel that their views are heard (96%), it's easy to contact their leaving care coach (89%), their birthdays and celebrations are remembered (97%) and that their Leaving Care Coach understands them as a person (92%).

A pathway has been developed to enable care experienced young people to access support more easily from the Waltham Forest CAMHS Children & Young People 18-25 Service.

Young people can access additional financial support where it is needed, for example the Housing Support Funds and also on an ad hoc basis to pay for unforeseen expenses, or in emergencies or where there are issues around budgeting in these difficult times. However, there are challenges around resources within the service due to high caseload and the increasing number of young people exiting care and transferring to the leaving care service.

Difference made for children and young people in care in 2022-2023

1.14. Our children & young people are being heard and they are receiving the support they want with their living arrangements, family time and keeping safe

- In 2022/23 our children gave their views to nearly all reviews (99.5%) and most reviews were actually attended by the child / young person.

- There has been an improvement in the quality of Pathway Plans that were completed, with IRO's being satisfied with 93% of those plans.
- 91% of children had permanence plans at their second review, which has been maintained since the previous year.

1.15. What's next for 2023-2024

Priorities for the coming year across service areas-

- Work with the partners to capture the voice of Looked After Children and Care Leavers on an ongoing basis to ensure their needs are being met and their views are taken into consideration in shaping the service. Ensure child friendly language is used when writing reports, combining the lessons from 'language that cares' (TACT 2019).
- Improve performance of health indicators and continue partnership working to improve timeliness and quality of statutory health assessments and ensuring the sharing of health information in a timely manner including an annual audit of IHA and RHAs.
- Continue to monitor and profile the outcomes for better physical and mental health for all and safeguard children and care leavers against exploitation, including those children placed out of borough. This will enable us to understand and mitigate the risks involved in this vulnerable cohort.
- Work collaboratively with partners at placement to embed the ICB/ICS strategy for Looked After Children at Place.
- Work with partners including Health, Social Care and IRO to ensure the health plans of children are monitored and actioned at each review.
- Work with partners to strengthen transition of children leaving care and ensure that they receive a Leaving Care Health Summary.
- Work with the children in care council and care leavers champions to develop more health promotion activities on their chosen topics and involve the public health and provider health team.
- Work closely with partners to ensure children have access to routine immunisations and dental checks,
- Ensuring that every Care Leaver has their health summary when they turn 18
- Fully implement the health aspects of the Care Leavers Offer, including the localised Care Leavers Compact
- Finding new and powerful ways to amplify the voice of our children and young people through a research project
- Rolling out an exciting new programme of interventions for young people aged between 16-19, using the newly created Post-16 Pupil Premium
- Seizing opportunities for apprenticeships and employment through the Council making 'Care Experience' a protected characteristic

- Re-designing the Virtual School offer for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, especially available support across the age range locally and aligning with Waltham Forest's ambition as a Borough of Sanctuary
- Raising children's aspirations in partnership with universities, particularly the University of Portsmouth
- Encourage more of our children to take part in the staff appraisal survey
- Review the Children in Care Pledge

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

Council is asked to **AGREE** the Corporate Parenting Annual report 2022/23.

3. **BACKGROUND**

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.

4. **CONCLUSION**

Demand for corporate parenting services has continued to increase as a result of cost of living crisis and ensuring high quality, equitable and safe services has remained essential for the Board. Across the corporate system, ensuring the key priority areas for service provision and delivery has remained a focus of review and evaluation to help understand the ever-changing needs and ensure appropriate resources are put in place at the right time.

As such, over the next few years the job of the corporate parenting service to cover the costs of everything will become even more challenging than normal but this won't stop the service from making sure we get the best and most effective services possible for our children in care and care experienced young people. The promise from the service and the Board is to treat our children and young people as our own child and this means that we'll make sure they have everything they need to live a happy and independent life when they leave care.

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

5. IMPLICATIONS

“There are no implications as a result of this report going to the committee, as it covers an existing policy of the council and no change is proposed.”

5.1. Finance, Value for Money and Risk

There are no specific new financial implications relating to the contents of this report. The Children social care budget continues to be under significant pressure with the vast majority attributed to alternative home packages of care. For example, 41% of expenditure in children social care in 2022-2023 relates to Placements costs.

5.2. Legal

There are no specific new legal implications relating to the contents of this report. The Children’s Act 1989 outlines the Council’s duties in relation to meeting it’s corporate parenting responsibilities.

5.3. Equalities and Diversity

NB. Include Care Leavers implications in this section although they are not listed in the current Equality Impact Assessment. The Council has adopted care leavers as a protected characteristic in April 2023. This should be a consideration for all policies and may affect other decisions. The service is working collaboratively with different departments/stakeholders within the council to provide multi-agency response to meeting the needs of care experienced young people and this include Housing, DWP, Probation, apprenticeship schemes, Rent arrears, Council Tax exemption, Health, Education. Leisure, support with travel cost etc. Whilst ensuring that care experienced young people are provided with every opportunity, they need to achieve better life chances, adopting care leavers as a Protected Characteristics will help to break wider barriers that exist within the system. The service is aware of intersectional barriers and will challenge policies that does not promote inclusivity, diversity and equity. Already, leaving care services and support are designed to identify and enhance council wide opportunities for care experienced young people to benefit from their corporate parents. The service will continue to improve and make required changes needed to fully implement the aims and objectives of making care leavers a protected characteristics.

- 5.4. **Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder**

- 5.5. **Council Infrastructure (e.g. human resources, accommodation or IT issues**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

**Fostering service annual report
Adoption service annual report
Fostering panel annual report
Health update/annual report
Virtual school update report
IRO update report
Voice and influence update report
Business intelligence Dashboard report**