

Somerset Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022 – 2023

Executive Lead Member(s): Councillor Tessa Munt – Lead Member for Children, Families and Education

Local Member(s) and Division: all

Lead Officer: Claire Winter - Executive Director for Childrens Services

Author: Fiona Phur, Partnership Business Manager

Contact Details: fiona.phur@somerset.gov.uk

1. Summary

- 1.1.** The Somerset Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) meets quarterly to take reports from its four sub-groups on progress to improve the lives of children and young people in care. It is also responsible for making sure that the aims of the Somerset's Corporate Parenting Strategy are met.
- 1.2.** In 2022-2023 children looked after, care leavers, their carers and the services that support them in Somerset have faced challenges around making ends meet during a cost-of-living crisis; keeping healthy; engaging with their education and navigating structural changes in their communities.
- 1.3.** Staff in Children's Social Care and its partners have operated in a changing climate of local government and local health reorganisation and a change of political administration while at the same time having undergone a month-long OFSTED inspection, a Peer Challenge with Gloucestershire and national and local safeguarding reviews. All this at a time when children coming into local authority care were presenting with more complex needs.
- 1.4.** The CPB has strived for assurance that our young people's experiences and needs have been understood and met during this transformational period. We also want to ensure those needs shape our local conversation and actions about how we ensure that the changes in Somerset enable more opportunities for our young people and the people who care for them, to thrive and become confident young adults with good prospects and stable lives.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1.**
- That Council recommends a continued focus on corporate parenting responsibility as our new structures and arrangements are established, especially around housing, education, apprenticeships and social value in our procurement systems.
 - That Council supports and promotes a whole council approach to create practical and specific offers to Care Leavers through our Local Offer and the Care Leaver Covenant.
 - That Council extends its thanks to the Somerset Care Council's young people for all the hard work that they undertake.
 - That council extends its thanks to the retiring Independent Chair of Corporate Parenting Board, Jill Johnson for her commitment and tenacity during her tenure from 2016- 2022.

3. Background

- 3.1.** The role of the Somerset Corporate Parenting Board is to ensure that Somerset Council, fulfils its duties towards children looked after (CLA); corporately and in partnership with other statutory agencies, including the NHS and Police. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025 and Terms of Reference (TOR), including membership of the Corporate Parenting Board, clearly define roles and responsibilities
- 3.2.** The Corporate Parenting Board has met quarterly throughout the year, receiving regular updates from officers, partners and the Somerset In Care Council (SiCC) and Somerset Leaving Care Council (SLCC) who are a representative group of young people looked after or leaving care and are supported by a Participation Worker (see Appendix B for their report). The voice of the child is a key aspect of the Strategy, and the Board has continued to engage with young people, both through their representation on the Board, and through SiCC and SLCC which is well established and has an effective and regular link with the Board.

The Council's corporate parenting arrangements were reviewed following May 2022 Local Elections to ensure Somerset continues to provide a robust Corporate Parenting approach.

Full council in June 2022 approved the new elected members, and the updated annual action plan, and the arrangements set out in the corporate parenting strategy. Currently, ten elected members are committed to the Board.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025 sets out how Somerset intends to fulfil its responsibilities against the Seven Principles of Corporate Parenting in a way that puts children and young people at the centre of improvements in the

planning, delivery and evaluation of our services. It forms the framework in which Somerset staff, elected members and relevant partners will work.

3.3. Promotion of the Seven Principles of Corporate Parenting:

In order to thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. The corporate parenting principles set out Seven Principles (identified in section one of the Children and Social Work Act 2017) that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people as follows:

1. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
2. to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
3. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
4. to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
5. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
6. for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
7. to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

These principles form the structure of our actions and guide the decisions and challenges we make as a board.

3.4. The focus of the Corporate Parenting Board is on the delivery of five priorities covering placement sufficiency and stability, education, health, voice of the child and leaving care through well-established sub-groups with good cross agency working, led by a senior officer, and supported by a councillor from the Board. Additionally, the key areas of foster carer development and achieving permanence are led by the council's fostering and adoption services. Action owners on the groups take responsibility for issues to deliver solutions within deadlines.

The outcomes of this work are reported quarterly through the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) performance reporting arrangements, against four improvement programmes. Reports are complemented by detailed data and performance measures provided to the Board to support them in their role in leading and challenging service delivery.

This report provides an update of the function and impact of the Board over the past 12 months.

4. 2022 – 2023 Achievements

- 4.1.** Achievements 2022-2023 (see Appendix A): this information evaluates the progress against the annual priorities set for 2022/23.
- 4.2.** The Board has continued to meet virtually via Teams at a time when members of the Care Councils can join the meeting after school or college.
- 4.3.** Attendance has been strong, and use of technology has been embedded.
- 4.4.** The chair of the Corporate Parenting Board is a member of the Partnership Business Group of the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership. The group reports to and aligns with the Safeguarding priorities and those of the Children & Young People's Plan 2022-2024.
- 4.5.** The chair especially wishes to highlight the many positive outcomes from the work of the Board and sub-groups especially:
 - That the work of the Corporate Parenting Board was positively recognised in the OFSTED Inspection where the inspection outcome led to Somerset's Childrens Social Care (CSC) service being recognised as Good.
 - The health adoption process has been strengthened with additional staff.
 - An additional paediatrician recruited to support Initial Health Assessment and other Children Looked After (CLA) work.
 - Children's participation in their CLA reviews rose from 91% to 96%
The strategic partnership for ten new Children's Homes in Somerset – called Homes & Horizons – has progressed well and young people have been actively involved in the development of the project.
 - The project won the category of Partnership Working at the prestigious MJ (Municipal Journal) Awards and the Somerset team attended the ceremony in London.
 - Route One provided a designated advocate linked to each of the newly opened children's homes.
 - 92% of children aged 4-years+ had advocacy support at their Child Protection Conference (CPC).
 - Children invited to attend a CPC are now able to watch an animation co-produced with SiCC and SLCC, that helps them to understand the process.

- SiCC and SLCC took part in a CSC peer review with Gloucestershire on CLA and Safeguarding in Schools by hosting an online debate with young people from Gloucestershire.
- SiCC and SLCC have developed a Creatives group for young people to have a voice about their lived experiences through poetry, writing and music.
- 105 of the 110 newly elected councillors have undertaken Corporate Parenting training.
- Children at risk of exploitation are now supported via a Child in Need (CiN) meeting where advocacy support has increased.
- The Virtual School has refreshed its offer following the Inclusion redesign and formed a new Governance Board
- All Personal Education Plans (PEPS) are quality assured, and RAG rated and the majority have been found to be green (good).
- Children's Commissioning and SiCC and SLCC have collaborated on the tender to re-commission the 16+ Accommodation Service
- An additional Quality Assurance assistant in the Children's Commissioning has ensured that commissioned placements (homes) are of the highest possible quality.
- Films for UnAccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children arriving in-Somerset are being developed in three languages in collaboration with children and young people, the Leaving Care Team and the Engagement & Participation team.
- Somerset's Leaving Care service were runners-up at the National Benchmarking Awards for the Personal Advisor team.
- A greater percentage (7%) of young people are continuing onto Higher Education – from 4.9% in 21/22 to 11.9% in 22/23.

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author.