

Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Tessa Munt, Executive Member for Children and Families
Local Member(s) and Division: Jane Lock, Independent Chair, Somerset Corporate Parenting Board

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1. Summary

1.1 The Somerset Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) meets quarterly to take reports from its four sub-groups on progress to improving 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 2021-2022 children looked after, care leavers, their carers and the services that support them in Somerset have worked hard to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, many schools are still getting back to pre-pandemic attendance levels. The CPB has strived for assurance that our young people's experiences and needs have been understood and met during this recovery period. We also want to ensure those needs shape our local conversation and actions about how we support the outcomes of the impact of the pandemic for our young people and the people who care for them in the future.

1.3 During this recovery period the CPB continues to function effectively with reports from officers and partners showing clear progress against the seven Principles of Corporate Parenting. Our OFSTED Inspection report in July 2022 noted that 'Somerset County Council is an active and caring Corporate Parent with a well-structured Corporate Parenting Board that is committed and effective. The Board is reflective, holding itself and senior leaders accountable for the quality of care provided to children. Its work is enhanced by the openness and energy of the input from the Children in Care and Care Leaver Councils.'

This annual report highlights the high quality of delivery that our front-line staff undertake, and the Board's ability to influence this delivery through its direct contact with operational leads in its subgroups and supports Children's Social Care journey to attaining an Outstanding OFSTED judgement.

- 1.4** The Board has continued to report progress virtually this year; with officers, sub-groups and members embedding their knowledge of technology and learning how to collaborate effectively through screens. This report highlights clear signs of progress and success as well as acknowledging areas that still need to improve to support our children looked after and care leavers to be safe, well and prepared for adult life.
- 1.5** The Board has also prepared to access the advantages that a unitary council will offer the children and young people we care for from 2023.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** The Corporate Parenting Board requests:
- That Council recommends a focus on corporate parenting responsibility as we move to a unitary council
 - 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 extend its thanks to the Somerset Care Council's young people for all the hard work that they undertake.

3. Background

- 3.1** The role of the Somerset Corporate Parenting Board is to ensure that Somerset County Council, together with the four District Councils, fulfil their duties towards children looked after (CLA), corporately and in partnership with other statutory agencies, including the NHS and Police. The existing Corporate Parenting Strategy and Terms of Reference (TOR), including membership, of the Corporate Parenting Board were agreed by Council in June 2022.
- 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.
- 3.3** The Council's corporate parenting arrangements were reviewed following May 2022 Local Elections to ensure Somerset continues to provide a robust Corporate Parenting approach.
- 3.4** 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.

3.5 The chair especially wishes to highlight the many positive outcomes from the work of the Board and sub-groups especially:

- Care Experienced people of any age are now part of SCC Guaranteed Interview Scheme, where the essential criteria of a job are met
- There is more capacity for the Medical Adviser for Adoption for compliance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations
- The health of Children Looked After and Care Leavers in COVID recovery is promoted with practitioners and carers
- All 16-17 years care leavers receive hard copies of their Health Passports
- All children coming in care aged 5+ years meet an advocate to learn about their rights and how to communicate using Mind of My Own
- 95% of all Child Protection Conferences now have advocacy representation
- Online Corporate Parenting training to all SCC staff has resulted in 800+ completed modules
- SiCC and SLCC are involved in the strategic partnership to commission homes for children – Homes2Inspire – a collaboration between commissioning, procurement, CSC, SiCC and SLCC and The Shaw Trust
- Electronic Personal Education Plans (E-PEPs) are now fully launched with key monitoring delivered by WelfareCall – EPEP, attendance, suspensions and exclusions
- The Virtual Head now has a strategic role around the education of all children with social workers and support and monitoring in place
- A collaboration with Job Centre, leaving care service and SomersetWorks has seen a reduction in care leavers who are NEET from 36% (2019/20) to 30% June 2022
- A specialist senior leaving care worker has been recruited to reduce homelessness
- Long term placement stability for CLA has increased to 67% compared to 63.6% at the same point last year

4. Background Papers

- 4.1** Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2021 – 2022, available on request.
- 1.1.**

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