

Lead Member's Annual Report

Introduction

Surrey County Council has approximately 850 children living in its care at any one time. The exact number will change on a daily basis, because as some children enter into care, others leave for a variety of reasons, possibly to return home, to move to live with a permanent new family, or because they have reached the age of 18 years, and have become care leavers.

We also have approximately 450 young people who are aged 18 to 21 years old, and who are known collectively as our care leavers.

We have responsibilities for all these children as Corporate Parents. One of the most important and significant parts of the Lead Member's role is to make sure that we are looking after these children properly, working with our partners to provide the best possible services, and making sure they can grow up healthy and happy.

Lead Member of Children's Services (LMCS) Role

The Lead Member has a statutory role that was established in the Children Act 2004. The Lead Member has political responsibility for the leadership, strategy, and effectiveness of Children's Services. The LMCS is responsible for ensuring that the needs of all children and young people, including the disadvantaged and vulnerable, and their families and carers are addressed. In doing so the LMCS will work closely with local multi-agency partners through various strategic boards to improve the well-being and ultimate outcomes of children and young people. The LMCS is not drawn into day-to-day operational management of Children's Services and education, but has to provide strategic leadership, support and challenge to both the Director of Children's Services and the senior management team, as appropriate.

As Lead Member I chair the multi-agency Corporate Parenting Board (CPB), which holds to account the Local Authority and all partner agencies in how they discharge their duties for Surrey's Looked after Children, wherever they are living.

A new Corporate Parenting Board was re-launched in 2009, which set an ambitious and clear strategic direction to improve the care of our Looked after Children and care leavers. Membership of the Board can be seen at Appendix 1.

Through this report I will be outlining the key areas of work covered by the Board and myself, for the period July 2012 to December 2013.

The Corporate Parenting Board also has cross party political membership, and I am grateful to Peter Hickman and John Orrick for their commitment and hard work as members of the Corporate Parenting Board. The Chairman of the Children and Families Select Committee can attend as a participant observer.

Work programme and achievements

Offending

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The Youth Justice Service reports directly to the Corporate Parenting Board, which annually scrutinises the Youth Justice Strategy and sets ambitious and challenging targets for reducing the involvement of Looked after Children in the criminal justice system.

I am pleased to report that in 2011 and 2012 there were no Surrey Looked after Children first time entrants into the criminal justice system. This is testimony to the strong multi-agency work in place.

The Corporate Parenting Board was concerned that the Looked after Children who are placed out of county may not have the same strong support and access to restorative justice approaches in place in Surrey. In 2012 the Corporate Parenting Board asked the Youth Justice Service to develop a regional protocol across the South East Region for reducing offending and criminalization of children in care.

As Lead Member I have been involved in this work, both through the Corporate Parenting Board and through my membership on the Youth Justice Board. On 5th December 2013 I chaired the Surrey-hosted South East Regional meeting that was attended by 10 local authorities (East Sussex, West Sussex, Hants, Kent, Medway, Surrey, Southampton, Portsmouth, Brighton and Hove, Isle of Wight) and by four police authorities (Surrey, Kent, Hampshire and Sussex). I am pleased to report that the regional protocol was formally adopted. Work is continuing to address this area of need.

This year the National Youth Justice Board for England and Wales described Surrey's performance as exceptional.

I would like to thank all the staff involved in making this happen, and for their ongoing commitment to Surrey's Restorative Justice programme, which contributes to a very significant reduction in first time entrants into criminal justice system, saves tax payers money, and prevents young people's lives being unnecessarily blighted by the burden of a criminal record.

Children Placed Out of County

As Lead Member I am concerned with and mindful of the quality of placements, the suitability of accommodation, and the care provided to our Looked after Children placed out of county.

I have visited various service providers outside Surrey, and will continue with those visits throughout this year.

Two of the key challenges for the Corporate Parenting Board are to increase the number of placements provided within Surrey, and to ensure that those children and young people placed out of county are not disadvantaged. They must have the same opportunities as all our Looked after Children and young people.

Mindful of the risks around these vulnerable young people, the Corporate Parenting Board has a standing item to scrutinise the number of children and young people

placed out of county. We pay close attention to the outcomes for this special group of children and young people, focusing on better health, improving assessments and educational outcomes, and reducing school exclusions in this group.

I have provided funding for the Care Council to set up a road show to visit children and young people placed out of county to hear their experiences and to seek their opinions of the services provided.

There will be a variety of reasons why children may need a specialist placement. Examples of young people include one young man who is on the autistic spectrum and who needs a placement that can provide consistent care and education, whilst managing his challenging behaviour. Another young person, for example, has been through many difficulties, including breakdown from her adoptive family, and needs specialist therapeutic support to help her to understand and cope with her feelings.

Education

The Head Teacher of the Surrey Virtual School attends the Corporate Parenting Board to report on educational performance and other issues. There is much evidence that the educational performance and attainment of children in care is well below that of all children nationally. What is more, changes in placement that result in a change of school can put children in care at a serious disadvantage. Therefore the Corporate Parenting Board has set clear priorities to:

- Champion the educational needs of children and young people, both those looked after by Surrey and other local authorities and educated inside the county, and those cared for by Surrey but are attending schools in other local authorities.
- Promote the aspiration for educational achievement, by demanding it is a priority within the lives of Looked after Children to improve their outcomes and life chances.
- Ensure all children and young people have access to the best possible education, and are provided with every chance to progress and realise their individual potential.
- Assess and review personalised support plans to raise attainment - providing advice, guidance and support for intervention where this is needed.

Over the last year there has been a particular focus on reducing school exclusions for Looked after Children. I am pleased to report that for the third year in succession there were no permanent exclusions of any Looked after Child. However, the Corporate Parenting Board is concerned with the high numbers of fixed term exclusions of children in care, and the reasons for these exclusions. The Virtual School has in place an agreed protocol concerned with exclusions for schools in Surrey, which partners have signed up to. The Virtual School reported to the Corporate Parenting Board in September 2013 that there has been a reduction over the year in fixed term exclusions. The number of exclusions fell from 82 cases in 2011-12, to 47 for 2012-13.

The work around ensuring robust packages of alternative learning, appropriate work experience with a partnership organisation, and close tracking and interventions for those who are excluded, has made an impact. We will continue monitoring to ensure the success is both sustained and embedded.

One area of continued focus is the timely completion of an up to date Personal Education Plan for every Looked after Child. A Personal Education Plan (PEP) sets out the educational targets for attainment and achievement, and recommendations for how this will be done.

Employability work stream

The Corporate Parenting Board has a sub-group, the Employability work stream, which takes a lead for the Board in looking at how additional support can be provided for young people as they move forward into the world of work. The Employability work stream looks at these areas of activity;

- 1) **The sponsor scheme**, which offers a work based sponsor to every Looked after young person aged 14-21 to help them get ready for work or training. Sponsors are linked with young people with a specific focus, and each sponsor will continue to provide individual support once a young person has found work or training. Although the scheme is small, we have a few elected members who act as sponsors, and more are about to start training. The sponsor scheme is well received by young people, and I would encourage all members to consider how they can support such a scheme by identifying possible sponsors.
- 2) **Apprenticeships**, I have taken a close interest in our apprenticeship schemes. We have a strong track record of employing apprentices with care experience within Children's Services and they provide invaluable benefit to our services through their work to support our Care Council, serving on Foster Panels and other working groups for service developments. They regularly attend Corporate Parenting Board to provide a rigorous challenge through Care Council Action/ Challenge Cards. The Corporate Parenting Board is keen to promote the apprenticeship scheme, as it gives care leavers confidence, responsibility for delivering key programmes, and the means to acquire new skills. I reported on the successes of our work with the apprenticeship scheme at full Council Meeting on 10th December 2013.

Early Help

I believe this to be a crucial area of focus for Children's Services and partners in Surrey. With diminishing resources available, it is more important than ever to target resources on services most likely to be effective in improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families, and that means addressing early intervention. The Select Committee has already received a report on Early Help. After a great deal of work an Early Help Strategy 2013-17 has been agreed with partners, and a document produced on Early Help multi-agency levels of need. I am pleased that partners are committing to both early help and intervention within a range of universal and targeted services.

The Corporate Parenting Board will continue to monitor development of the early help initiative and its progress.

Health Outcomes

Health outcomes have long been a cause for concern for our Looked after Children, and has been the subject of requirements from previous Ofsted inspections, where health care has been rated inadequate.

On April 1st 2013 Guildford and Waverley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) assumed the responsibility, previously held by NHS Surrey PCT, as the host commissioner on behalf of Surrey wide CCGs for Looked after Children Health Services in Surrey, with designated health professionals seconded to provider organisations such as Virgin Health Care and Central Surrey Health. Guildford and Waverley CCG inherited the backlog of 'out of county' Looked after Children health assessments, which had not been undertaken for some time. In September 2013 the Corporate Parenting Board raised serious concerns about the lack of progress in delivering this key health objective, and were offered no assurance as to how this matter would be addressed.

Together with officers, I met with staff from Guildford and Waverley CCG and this prompted an urgent review of the current position.

A series of commissioning actions have been agreed to resolve this long-standing and unsatisfactory position. Guildford and Waverley presented an urgent action plan to the Corporate Parenting Board in November 2013 to address the significant backlog. An update and progress report will be received by the Corporate Parenting Board in January 2014.

As a member of the Health and Wellbeing Board, I have been able to advocate strongly for all our Surrey children, and I am pleased to report that the health and wellbeing of children and young people has been identified as one of the key priorities for the Health and Wellbeing Board. Further work will be to evaluate the role and contribution of Public Health to improving children's health.

Care leavers

Support for our care leavers is a priority from the Corporate Parenting Strategy. I lead a work stream of the Corporate Parenting Board that has been set to oversee developments and improvements in this area. We have held a number of productive sessions using our Council Innovation SHIFT team, and work is being analysed and progressed.

Next year will be a key milestone in assessing the impact of improvements for our care leavers in the numbers in appropriate accommodation, and those engaged in training, education or employment. These two targets cannot be seen in isolation, but must be part of holistic care for young people that includes good transition plans for independence, health and wellbeing care, and support to develop relationships with their families and friends as they grow up.

Members Involvement

The Member's Bursary Fund has continued to grow from strength to strength this year. A total of 110 applications have been made in 2013 for a wide variety of rewards, from a set of cricket whites for a young person who has been successful in joining their local cricket team, to laptops and I-Pads to support education/ participation. It is a real strength of this Council, and something for all members to

be proud of, that they have shown such commitment to supporting our children in their role as Corporate Parents.

Training in the roles and responsibilities of being a Corporate Parent is an essential part of Members induction. This year we have been able to pioneer a new model of training called Total Respect. Total Respect training is led by young people who are in the care system, and therefore have direct experience of the services being discussed. This high impact training is very effective in helping those on the course to understand the impact of the care system on children and young people. Members of the Board, including myself and our Chief Executive, took part in developing this training with young people.

Engagement with young people

Please read our PLEDGE to the Children and Young People in our care (Appendix 2). I signed this on behalf of all members and staff of Surrey County Council, and it sets out our promise to work with children and young people and deliver what is important to them.

I would like to remind members of Surrey's ongoing savings scheme whereby Surrey will match fund savings of any Looked after Child up to a maximum of £250 per annum.

This is a part of our promise to help support our Looked after Children develop their personal financial and saving skills for when they become adults.

In addition to the Bursary Fund, funding by members is also used to support celebrating the achievements of our Looked after children and young people. For children aged 12 and under, we hosted a party at Dorking Halls in February 2013. The party had a circus theme and was very successful, with high numbers attending. A range of activities from circus skills and sideshows to the opportunity to try a musical instrument, supported by Surrey Arts, was on offer. All children aged 12 and under had an achievement from the last year highlighted on a paper balloon – the balloons covered two walls and made a very impressive display. All children received a 'goody bag' in addition to their balloon to take home.

At the other end of the age group, our care leavers decided they would like a more formal event so a dinner was held in the Ashcombe suite. The theme was 'Dress to Impress', and they certainly did so! Certificates of achievement were handed out on the night.

In December 2013 we held our second Christmas dinner for our care leavers. As part of developing this service care leavers had told us that one of the things they may miss most when they leave care is having a Christmas dinner with others. The Care Leavers Service now hosts a meal before the Christmas break for all who want to attend. The event is growing in success and provides additional support at this time of year.

The year ahead

As Lead Member I will continue to serve on all the multi-agency boards, which have a responsibility for delivering services and influence outcomes for children and young people, namely;

The Surrey Children's Safeguarding Board
The Corporate Parenting Board
The Youth Justice Board
The Health and Wellbeing Board
The Surrey Virtual School Management Board
The Surrey Alliance as appropriate
The South East 7 Board for Lead Members and Directors of Children's Services
Surrey County Council and District and Boroughs Members and Officer working with Children's and Youth Services.

The Corporate Parenting Board will continue to drive forward on our four main priorities to improve outcomes for Looked after Children and young people in our care.

We must keep children and young people at the heart of everything we do, and work with them to develop our services and review our quality and impact of our actions.

Finally I have now held this position for 4 years, and I often reflect on the considerable organisational changes and events that have occurred in the service in that time. But what always impresses me is the commitment and dedication of our staff. The work of a social worker is immensely challenging, with each day bringing new difficulties when dealing with issues like alcohol and drug misuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, family dysfunction, mental health and neglect being the norm of the day.

It can also be hugely rewarding knowing that you have helped keep a child safe – free to flourish, or have kept a family together. I can think of no other profession that puts such a heavy burden of responsibility and the stress that entails on our staff. We need to respect and support the profession, and have realistic expectations of all staff.

Children enter care for a variety of reasons and go on to have very different journeys while they are there. I believe that we have a care system in Surrey that can be responsive and flexible enough to meet the needs of individual children, their carers, and their birth families. When the care system is used effectively in this way, it can be a powerful tool for improving the lives of children and young people.

I also want to thank the members of the Children and Education select committee for their interest and scrutiny of the service.

Mary Angell
Lead Member for Children and Families

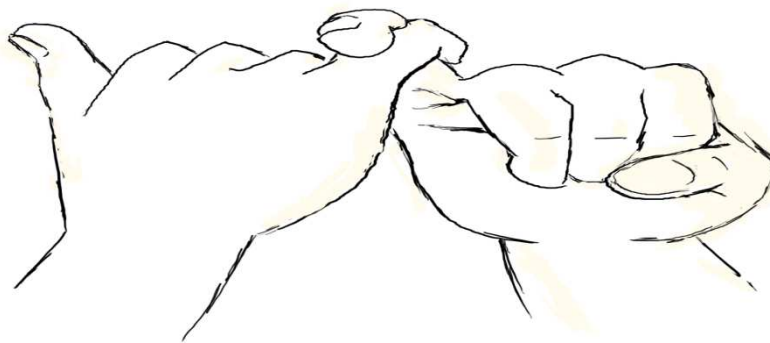
Appendix 1**Corporate Parenting Board Membership**

Councillor Mary Angell	Cabinet Member for Children & Families, SCC
Councillor Yvonna Lay	Surrey County Council
Councillor Peter Hickman	Surrey County Council
Councillor Linda Kemeny	Surrey County Council
Councillor Clare Curran	Surrey County Council
Councillor John Orrick	Surrey County Council
David McNulty	Chief Executive, SCC
Russell Pearson	Head of Fire and Rescue, SCC
Caroline Budden	Deputy Director Children's, Schools and Families, SCC
Carmel Millar	Head of HR and Organisational Development, SCC
Patrick Ward	Acting Head of Virtual Schools, SCC
Ian Banner	Head of Commissioning, Children's, Schools and Families, SCC
Ben Byrne	Head of Youth Support Services, Services for Young People, SCC
Sheila Jones	Head of Countywide Services, Children's, Schools and Families, SCC
Gavin Stephens	Assistant Chief Constable, Surrey Police
Sarah Parker	Associate Director for Children's Commissioning, NHS Guildford & Waverley CCG
Vicky Stobbart	Acting Executive Nurse/Director of Quality and Safeguarding, NHS
Sue Barham	Districts and Boroughs Representative
Dr Christine Arnold	Designated Doctor for Looked After Children

Our pledge

To our children and young people

- To care about you, be honest with you and keep you in mind.
- Only make promises that we know we can keep and when mistakes are made to make sure we learn from them.
- To provide you with somewhere to live, with people who care about you.
- To involve you fully in plans about all aspects of your life.
- To listen to you and take your points of view seriously.
- To keep you safe and help support you to make the right choice.
- To help you to keep in touch with the important people in your life.
- To ensure you receive excellent education and health advice.
- To ensure your experience of care results in positive outcomes and prepares you for becoming an adult.
- To help and support you to live independently when the time is right.
- To make sure you know your rights and who to turn to when you need help.
- To be there for you and do everything we can to make sure you are happy.



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