



Social Care Services Board
4 March 2016

Lead Member's Annual Report for Corporate Parenting

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services

The Lead Member's annual report provides an overview of the Corporate Parenting Board and its work through the previous year.

Corporate Parenting and Lead Member

1. Corporate Parenting is the collective responsibility across services and local authorities to safeguard and promote the life chances of children who are looked after. Every elected member of Surrey County Council has legal responsibilities under the Children Act 2004, as a corporate parent to the children in the care of our council. It is the responsibility of all councillors to be satisfied that there is:
 - Effective policy in place
 - Mechanisms to support the participation of looked after children
 - Good scrutiny to inform improvement
2. The Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) 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.

Children and care leavers in Surrey

3. Looked after Children and care leavers who are in the care of Surrey County Council are amongst the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community. The life experiences they will have been through before coming into care may have a major impact on their development and ability to grow and succeed in life. In addition, the consequences of being separated from family and community, whether through the need to protect from abuse or to support following neglect, may additionally impact on their progress.
4. It is essential that this group of children and young people are provided with the right services and the right support in order to support them in achieving well.
5. In order to grow up successful and happy, all children and young people need key things to be in place for their development. They need to be attached to caring and consistent carers, to live somewhere they feel safe and secure, to go to school where they are supported to achieve well and to make friends, to be healthy and happy, able to take part in all the hobbies and activities they would like to, to be a part of their community and to contribute and finally to go to university or further education, to find the right job for them and to leave home at the right time for them, to live independently as adults.
6. As Corporate Parents we need to check on the services and support we are providing to see if they are helping children to achieve to the best of their abilities and to provide them with the best opportunities.
7. At the end of December 2015 there were 884 children in the care of Surrey County Council, a significant increase over the previous year from 779 in January 2015. The biggest factor affecting the growth in numbers has been the increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children for whom we have responsibility, rising from 97 in January 2015 to 158 in December. There were 454 care leavers who were entitled to ongoing support until the age of 21, or 24 when in higher education.

Summary of key points from the Lead Member's report

8. Last year we refreshed our Corporate Parenting Strategy, to review our progress to date and to plan our priorities for 2015-17. Children and young people, carers, staff and partners worked together to complete this refresh.
9. An important part of our responsibilities is our pledge to our children in care which outlines our promises to them, as corporate parents, about the quality of care we will provide for them. As members we are collectively responsible for this promise.
10. Placement Stability has continued to improve, with a reduction to 8% of children who had three or more placements for the year of 2014-15.

Surrey is now placed 29th in the national performance tables for looked after children and careleavers, a tremendous improvement since the first tables were published in 2011 when we were ranked 113th. Improving placement stability provides the fundamental basis on which all other improvements can be built.

11. However, too many of our children need to be placed outside of Surrey as we have a shortage of foster carers and we need to ensure, collectively, that we are taking all necessary actions to address this.
12. We have introduced a service to provide independent return interviews for those who go missing from our foster care placements in Surrey. We are monitoring the outcomes of these interviews to ensure we are able to identify trends and themes as to why children go missing.
13. Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) commissioners have implemented the revised health service they are now procuring, with additional posts now successfully recruited to.
14. Whilst there continue to be concerns about the timeliness of health assessments for our children, a major change has been introduced this year with an agreement that consent for health care, given at the start of a care period, will apply throughout a child's stay in care, removing the need to renew this annually. This should provide significant support to improve timeliness.
15. A format for providing health histories for care leavers has now been agreed and was introduced in 2015.
16. Education outcomes have continued to improve although we are always aware of the impact of different cohorts from year to year. It is essential that individual children are encouraged to achieve to the best of their ability and we have now introduced an e-Pep to facilitate providing this support.
17. Progress in supporting our young people so that fewer of them enter the criminal justice system continues, with a reduction in the numbers of young people entering the criminal justice system for the sixth year in a row.
18. Priorities for the year ahead include a continuing focus on those who go missing or who are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation to ensure we are providing the best possible care and to consider what resources we have available to meet the needs of those young people who are in our care as unaccompanied asylum seeking children, an area of our care we believe will continue to grow in response to international events.

Conclusions:

19. The Board is asked to receive and scrutinise the Lead Member's report on Corporate Parenting for Surrey

Recommendations:

20. That the Committee note the progress and challenges as outlined in the Lead Member's report
21. The Committee is asked to consider what further opportunities they have to support good outcomes for our children and young people in care.

Next steps:

To implement agreed recommendations as required

Lead Member to share report findings with the Education and Skills Board as appropriate

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**Sources/background papers:
Children's Act, 2004**