

# Lead Member's Annual Report

## **Introduction**

As Members, one of the primary responsibilities we have is to ensure that those children who are growing up in the care of Surrey County Council, as our looked after children and careleavers, are provided with the best possible opportunities and support to achieve to their full potential. All members of Surrey County Council have responsibility as corporate parents to ensure the wellbeing of our children in care, with additional responsibilities for those who are members of the Social Care Services Board to be informed through understanding and scrutiny of services. This annual report is my report on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Board to outline the progress we have made this year and to highlight specific areas of work and development.

## **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. 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. It is a requirement for the Lead Member to provide an annual update to members on how we are meeting our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

## **Corporate Parenting Board**

Growing up in care can be a positive experience for children and young people, provided we make sure that our services work effectively to improve outcomes, and as noted above, it is one of the most significant responsibilities we have as members to make sure that we continue to do the best we can, in line with national and local expectations, to ensure that their care is provided to a high standard, as if they were our own children.

In order to achieve this, we have a Corporate Parenting Framework in place, headed by the Corporate Parenting Board, to oversee our services for our looked after children and careleavers and to monitor their impact. The Board is a multi-agency partnership, with

representatives from members, Council officers and partner agencies, who meet bi-monthly to address this work.

Throughout most of 2015 the role as Lead Member for Corporate Parenting (and Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Board) was held by Councillor Mary Angell and I would like to extend my thanks to Mary for all her hard work and commitment to our children and young people. It is now my responsibility as Cabinet member to undertake this role. Other Members representing all members on the Board included Linda Kemeny, Clare Curran, John Orrick and Peter Hickman. This annual report is our report on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Board to outline the progress we have made during the past year and to highlight specific areas of work and development.

### **Corporate Parenting Strategy**

As of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015, there were 884 looked after children, an increase of 105 over the year. There were 454 careleavers who were entitled to ongoing support until the age of 21, or 24 when in higher education.

A core part of our work for 2015 was to oversee the refresh of our Corporate Parenting Strategy. This strategy sets out the key priorities to ensure that work to improve outcomes for our children is co-ordinated and effective. The updated Strategy was developed in consultation with children and young people, carers and staff from both the County Council and from partner agencies. It was approved by the Board in July.

### **Our Pledge**

As Corporate Parents we have a duty to ensure that all the children in our care and those leaving care have the same life chances and outcomes that all good parents want for their own children. An important part of our responsibilities is our pledge which outlines our promises. As part of the refresh of the Corporate Parenting Strategy we also completed work to renew our Pledge, again in full consultation with children and young people. The new Pledge is attached at Appendix 2.

### **Care Council**

Care Council is a group of care experienced young people aged 13-24 who meet monthly to talk about what is important to looked after children and careleavers. They come up with ideas about what they would like to stop, start or change about the care system in Surrey. Care Council members and our Children's Rights Apprentices attend Corporate Parenting Board for alternate meetings, providing a welcome space to hear directly from each other and to feedback from all about progress in making changes and improvements.

## **Child Sexual Exploitation and children who go missing**

The Ofsted integrated inspection report, published in June 2015 highlighted that across the Board we are not being effective enough in our approaches and management of CSE or for children who go missing. In response the service together with partners have taken a number of steps to address the concerns of both Ofsted and the HMIC: specifically, they have reviewed the procedures for responding to CSE cases; provided training for staff in the front line teams; they have revised the Risk Assessment forms in line with best practice, and they have overhauled the multiagency arrangements for overseeing CSE planning.

Looked after children are one of the key vulnerable groups who are likely to be affected by CSE and an examination of our understanding and approach to managing CSE was a priority area of focus for the Board over the last year. This included a joint presentation from Children's services and Police about current arrangements and oversight. A case study was used to consider how children who have been a victim of CSE or who may be at risk are protected. This included considering how we respond to children who are missing from care.

For the year covered by this report (January to December 2015) a total of 165 looked after children had been reported missing to the police. For many they are missing for less than 24 hours, though there were 163 episodes where children have been missing for longer periods of time from a day to many months for several unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Ten of these children have not yet been found having gone missing shortly after claiming asylum with us. For all children there are set processes with the police to consider the risks and the efforts to locate them following a missing incident.

An independent return home interview service has been in place since April 2015 for those children who are placed in foster care in Surrey and return interviews for those in residential care and for those placed out of county are conducted by residential workers from a different home or by the child's social worker. All return interview outcomes are collated to look for themes and indications from the first few months of the year are that the majority of the young people say they decided, usually on the spur of the moment, that they wanted to be back in their home area and to spend time with their friends.

A significant number of young people who run away from care have done so after an argument with their family and they have feelings of anger that they need to work out. In one case this was anger at being in care and feeling that they did not need to be in care.

A common theme that arises from the interviews is that once they have taken the decision to go out without telling their carer, then feelings of fear, or embarrassment, or worry mean that children report that they don't know how to end the episode. The episode therefore extends to longer than perhaps they originally intended.

A small number ran away from school and this is part of a theme running through a number of those young people who run away from care regarding testing the boundaries and not wanting to adhere to boundaries that had not been imposed when they had been at home.

Of particular concern is the fact that very few of the young people described being afraid of the consequences of being missing and tended to think they were safe and nothing could happen to them.

Work will be ongoing to address all of these issues and to support work to reduce the numbers of incidents where children go missing and to ensure that risks for CSE are appropriately identified and addressed.

### **Placements and Placement Stability**

One of the single most important factors in providing the best care for children who are looked after is to ensure that they are able to live in stable placements, without frequent changes, where they have the opportunity to form close and loving attachments to those who care for them. This is an area that we have provided significant focus on as a Board for the last five years, as a priority in our strategy. Our services have worked closely together to share a common approach, through both social pedagogy for our foster carers and through a restorative approach in our residential homes, recognising the importance of relationships and attachment for children. This approach is shared across our care services, Virtual school, health colleagues and our Youth Support service, ensuring consistency in our care.

The key national indicator is for the number of children who have three or more placements a year, and for this indicator we have now moved to 8% of children which places us 29<sup>th</sup> across England, from a low point of 14% and 113<sup>th</sup> in 2010. It will now be our focus in a similar way to consider longer-term placement stability so that children experience fewer changes across their whole time in care.

A key part of this work is to ensure that we are able to meet our Sufficiency duty as a council, to provide sufficient placements within Surrey for those children who need to be in our care. Too many of our children need to be placed outside of Surrey, and although sometimes this can be for positive reasons, for example where they have moved to live with a close relative or for those who need a specialist resource such as a residential school for children with disabilities or a therapeutic placement for children with high emotional and wellbeing needs, we need to review our work to date and support improvements.

As Lead Member I continue to be very concerned that we are not able to provide sufficient foster placements within Surrey and am continuing work through our Corporate Parenting Board and now in discussion with our Department of Education advisor to be confident that all necessary steps are being taken to address and improve this area of our care. I am very disappointed that we have not improved our performance in this area, with 22% of our children being placed outside of Surrey's borders and more than 20 miles from where they used to live.

Our residential homes continue to achieve well, with 6 rated good and 1 as outstanding. Building on this strong foundation the Corporate Parenting Board has approved an approach to consider opening additional homes to meet our children's needs, including support for those at risk of CSE, to support us to provide safe care for them locally.

## **Health Care**

There continues to be ongoing concerns about the timeliness of our health assessments and plans, and ensuring these are providing the right information to support our children to receive the best possible start in life as well as for them to take forward into adulthood a proper understanding and access to their health histories.

Our partners in Surrey's 6 CCG's had recognised the level of concern around this area of our care and had identified significant additional investment and resources to provide an improved service. Through 2015 recruitment has been underway and all the additional nursing posts have now been recruited to. In addition, a major change has taken place this year in that we have agreed 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. We have also agreed a format and process for providing health histories to young people as they leave care and this is now in place.

All of these factors should impact favourably on the timeliness of health assessments and plans and the Corporate Parenting Board will be monitoring this closely on behalf of all members to ensure compliance.

## **Educational Achievements**

Every looked after child, from early years to further education, must have a Personal Education Plan to outline their progress and to set targets for the next term. PEPs should be reviewed three times a year. It is always a complicated task to co-ordinate attendance at PEP reviews and our paper-based system has often led to delays as social workers need to ensure all elements are completed. To do this, they work in close conjunction with the Virtual School who take an active role in monitoring quality and effectiveness of these plans. To support this requirement further, this year has seen the introduction of the e-Pep, led by the Virtual School, whereby an electronic format is now in place to support timely completion and progress. The PEP has now become a fully live document making it a much more powerful tool in ensuring the best possible outcomes for each child.

I am pleased to report that there have been no permanent exclusions since 2009/10. We do not, as yet, have the national data for the educational achievements of our children, but provisional results show that at Key Stage 1 last year, our looked after children cohort achieved as well as their peers and for Key Stage 2 there was excellent progress with a 16% increase in students achieving level 4+ in all subjects.

Provisional results for those who have been in care for a year or more show a 2% increase from last year in the percentage of pupils achieving 5+ A\*-C, including English and Maths. It is of note that all but one of them had full care order status. Whilst children in care do not as a whole cohort achieve in line with their peers, research has shown that those who are in care for longer periods of time have the highest achievement levels and this would appear to be the case with our own children. The challenge we have is to improve results across the board for all vulnerable children, including those who enter care in their teenage years. We

also need to be mindful that 27% of this cohort had statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN).

### **Offending**

Our restorative approach has continued to be successful and for the sixth year in a row there has been a reduction in the number of looked after children coming to the attention of the criminal justice system. This is directly attributable to the strong partnership between Surrey County Council and Surrey's police force and a range of activities across services and the partnership to address youth offending. This has been noted through the current enquiry into the over-representation of looked after children in the criminal justice system led by Lord Laming, where not only did a team from Surrey attend to present evidence in London, but the Enquiry team also attended Surrey to see at first-hand through meeting with practitioners how this work is being progressed here.

### **Bursary Fund**

Members have continued to donate generously to our bursary award scheme to acknowledge and reward achievements by our children. A report on this scheme was presented to full council at the Annual General Meeting in May 2015. Awards this year included many items of equipment to support hobbies, including a cricket bat, football strip and several bikes as well as more specialist requests such as a contribution towards tools for a young man who is showing considerable talent in carpentry at college. This is a time of restricted budgets and we are very grateful for the support shown by members through their contributions and the opportunity to reward our children at times of success.

### **Care Leavers**

An essential element of providing good services for children who live in our care is to ensure that as they grow to be adults, they are supported through their transition to independence, with the right building blocks in place to achieve their ambitions. As Corporate Parents we have ongoing statutory responsibilities until young people who leave our care are either 21 years old or 24 if they continue in higher education. It is not uncommon for children in care to need slightly longer than their peers to achieve their goals, not least because of the additional impact they have from the circumstances and events that led to them being in our care.

Whilst there have always been indicators that are part of the national dataset and performance tables to provide some measure of our progress, these have been changed for the last two years to now show performance not only for those young adults aged 19 but also those who are 20 and 21, to provide a stronger reflection of how councils and local areas are meeting their duties. It is of particular pride that our statistics show that our young people continue to do better at 20 and 21, improving our overall ranking from 50<sup>th</sup> last year to 37<sup>th</sup> in the performance table this year. We are in line with the national average for those who were in higher education, with 6% attending university.

Whilst the average age for leaving home now is around 27 years old, careleavers have to manage their independence at a much younger age and although we have a strong track record of supporting young people in care until they are 18 in foster care, residential and supported lodgings, we are planning a further refresh of our supported accommodation framework to ensure the right homes and supported living options are available for them as they move to independence. 82% of our young people are deemed to be living in suitable accommodation as careleavers and we will be seeking to work closely with our district and borough colleagues to improve this outcome.

## **Looking Forward**

2015 has been a year of consolidation in improving outcomes for our looked after children and careleavers, with noticeable successes around reducing the number of placement moves children need to cope with as well as being able to do well in education and employment as they become independent adults.

However, we are also aware of the many challenges ahead and the support we will need to fulfil our duties. Health care and education will continue to be a priority, with a specialist focus on developing our aspirations for our children and young people to do well in higher education. Children who are at risk of sexual exploitation and children who go missing continue to be at the forefront of our work programme. In response to the Ofsted report (published in June 2015) which identified the need for improvements in our services, we have an Improvement Plan in place to address areas of concern. As part of this work for looked after children and careleavers, I am mindful of the requirement to improve the quality of our practice through our care plans and pathway plans and expect to see this reflected in the work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Another area that I know will be of particular concern for the next year is to be mindful of the impact of international conflicts and our need to focus on the increasing number of young unaccompanied asylum seekers who are in our care and who may have additional barriers of language and culture in accessing the right support. We need to consider what resources Surrey has available to meet these needs. We know this will be a growing area reflecting international events.

But throughout all of these challenges we will continue to ensure that we celebrate our children's successes and to show how we have always placed them at the centre of everything we do, to make sure they continue to grow in confidence and security in our care.

## Appendix 1

### Corporate Parenting Board Membership

Councillor Mary Angell	Cabinet Associate for Children, Schools and Families Wellbeing, SCC
Councillor Peter Hickman	Surrey County Council
Councillor Linda Kemeny	Cabinet Member for Schools, Skills and Educational Achievement, SCC
Councillor Clare Curran	Cabinet Member for Children and Families Wellbeing, SCC
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
Maria O'Shaughnessy	Head of Virtual Schools, SCC
Ian Banner	Head of Commissioning, CSF, SCC
Ben Byrne	Head of Youth Support Services, SYP, SCC
Sheila Jones	Head of Countywide Services, CSF, SCC
Gavin Stephens	Assistant Chief Constable, Surrey Police
Sarah Parker	Associate Director for Children's Commissioning, NHS GW CCG
Vicky Stobbart	Executive Nurse/ Director of Quality and Safeguarding, NHS
Sue Barham	Districts and Boroughs Representative
Dr Christine Arnold	Designated Doctor for Looked After Children
Belinda Newth	Head of Rights and Participation
Dr Clare Stevens	GP and Clinical Lead for NHS Guildford & Waverley CCG



# SURREY'S CHILDREN

Our care. Your future

Our pledge, to our children and young people.

## 1. Placements

We will do the best we can to make sure where you live is right for you.



## 2. Contact

We will help you keep in touch safely with the important people in your life.

## 3. Choices

We will tell you about options and involve you fully in making plans about your life.

## 4. Skills for life

We will support you with your education and help you grow up with good skills for life.

## 5. Safe

To keep you safe and ensure that you feel safe.

If you would like this information in large print, Braille, on tape or in another language please contact us on:

Email: [csfcommunications@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:csfcommunications@surreycc.gov.uk)

Tel: 03456 009 009

Minicom: 0208 541 9698

SMS: 07527 182861



# SURREY'S CHILDREN

Our care. Your future

Confident in care. Confident in my future.

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2015 - 2018

## Purpose

We are the corporate parents to our children and young people in care. We seek to ensure that the young people we look after grow up with the same opportunities as other young people and go on to live successful and fulfilling lives.

## Vision

As corporate parents we want every child to feel safe and confident about their future.

## Values

We are committed to:

- Listening to our young people and involving them fully in plans about their lives.
- Being responsible for looking after our young people and doing what we promise in our pledge.
- Building trust in our young people and our staff.
- Respecting the needs and wishes of our young people.

## Context

In Surrey, there are around 750-780 children and young people who are living in our care at any one time, and 420 careleavers who are moving to become more independent. There are around 120 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children in care (UASC) who have often had a traumatic journey into care.

The majority of our young people are placed in foster care and the remaining children are in residential homes, or placed for adoption or in independent living.

Where we live, who we live with and how safe and happy we feel are important factors which contribute to everyone's wellbeing. We agree with young people who tell us that if you can't live in the home you'd choose, it is especially important to get the next best option right.

We know we don't have enough placement choice, not enough foster carers who live in Surrey and that too many children have to live elsewhere.

Therefore our focus in 2015/2016 is placement choice and stability: Young people know who they will live with and experience stable placements. They will have good relationships with those involved in their care. See our summary Being in Care (2015) for more information.

## Our goal is that Surrey children and young people...

### are happy where they live

Young people know who they will live with and experience stable placements. They have good relationships with those involved in their care.

↓ Fewer children have to move places three or more times a year.

We know that:

We have made good improvements in placement stability but a small number of young people have to move places three or more times a year. Too many changes make it hard for young people to feel they belong. We don't have enough foster carers who live in Surrey and too many young people have to live elsewhere.

In 2015/16 we will:

- reduce the impact of change between placements, ensuring children are informed and involved in any changes to their placement
- train carers and staff in social pedagogy to offer children emotional support with practical hands-on action
- recruit more foster carers, particularly for teenagers or for children with disabilities appropriate.

### are healthy and aware of their choices

Young people are supported to have improved health and wellbeing.

↑ More children in care will have up to date health checks that include a wellbeing health check.

We know that:

Young people would like more choice about where and when to have their health assessments. Some young people would like more support with their healthcare if English is not their first language. Others have said they would like more advice and guidance about healthy eating and keeping active.

In 2015/16 we will:

- ensure we deliver an effective health check service that includes health promotion and emotional wellbeing
- ensure there are opportunities for young people to participate in fun activities including: the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, clubs, music lessons, sport and leisure, and physical activity
- help young people understand events and feelings through life story work.

### are and feel safe

Young people are safe and feel safe. If they go missing they are listened to, trusted and given a say when they return.

↓ Fewer children in care go missing

We know that:

Sometimes children go missing from their placement because they're not happy with their plans or because they're missing friends and family. Being missing means that they're at risk and not safe. It is really important that young people living independently feel safe at home.

In 2015/16 we will:

- actively work with young people to understand why they go missing, including having return interviews, and to support prevention
- offer a restorative approach to children in care who offend
- ensure children feel safe from bullying.

### are making progress

Young people have the confidence and skills to live successful and fulfilling lives.

↑ Children in care achieve more, especially at Key Stages 1 and 2 results.

We know that:

Young people feel supported in education by those around them such as their carers, social workers and school staff. It is important that young people have the right support, including financial support, to do the best they can. We need to make sure young people and their carers are aware of opportunities available to them.

In 2015/16 we will:

- manage change between school settings and make timely decisions on personal education plans
- provide extra support for children in Key Stage 2
- ensure that our youngest children have access to early years opportunities
- increase the number of apprenticeships available for young people who are not in education, training or employment.

### feel confident about becoming an adult

Young people are equipped for a successful and fulfilling future.

↓ Fewer care leavers are living in unsuitable accommodation

We know that:

Only a small number of young people live in unsuitable accommodation. Some young people require more support to live independently. Having a job, somewhere good to live and strong relationships are key to confidence.

In 2015/16 we will:

- strengthen the choices of accommodation we have for young people as they move into independence at 18
- offer every young person aged 14-21 a work sponsor to help them get ready for work
- work to improve young people's experiences when moving into independent living, including providing good information about the choices they have and their support network.

