



Social Care Services Board  
16 March 2017

## 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.
3. 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 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

4. One of the primary responsibilities Members have is to ensure that those children who are growing up in the care of Surrey County Council, as our looked after children and care leavers, are provided with the best possible opportunities and support to achieve to their full potential.
5. 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. 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.
6. This annual report (**Annex 1**) is the report of the Lead Member for Children's Services, on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Board, to outline the progress we have made during the 2016 calendar year and to highlight specific areas of work and development.
7. As of December 2016 there were 903 looked after children and 479 care leavers in our care.

## Summary of key points from the Lead Member's report 2016 (Annex 1)

8. Overall there has been some positive progress in 2016, with evidence of improvements in the priority areas for action identified for the year including Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and missing children, and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). More children have remained with their carer for at least two years, more care leavers are living in suitable accommodation, and more young people over 18 are being supported to "stay put" with their foster carers in stable, supportive homes.
9. For the year covered by this report, a total of 153 looked after children had been reported missing to the police. An independent return home interview service is in place for these children, supporting work to understand the reasons why children go missing and to reduce the number of episodes.
10. Work to improve placement stability has been a significant focus for our Corporate Parenting strategy for the last five years. Although we have made significant improvements in this area of our care as measured through reducing the numbers of children who have three or more placements a year, our outcome for this indicator for 2015/16 increased to 11% (from 8% in 2014/15). This reflected the numbers of teenagers who are assessed to be at risk of CSE or who have challenging behaviour, where specialist placements out of the Surrey area have been made.

11. A key area of concern continues to be the high percentage of our children (22%) who are placed outside of Surrey's borders and more than 20 miles from where they used to live.
12. There have been improvements in the number of health assessments completed (78% of children with a health assessment) and 95% who have visited the dentist, although our numbers with health assessments are still below the England average.
13. Changes in the measures for monitoring education outcomes mean that direct comparison with previous years is not possible. However, the introduction of the e-Pep has led to improvements in our tracking and monitoring of children's progress through the Virtual School. It is pleasing that there have again been no permanent exclusions this year.
14. Our restorative approach has continued to be successful and for the seventh 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. In May 2016 Lord Laming completed a review into keeping children in care out of trouble and cited Surrey's work as an example of best practice.
15. Pathway planning is an important part of the support we provide to our care leavers and 2016 has seen the development of a new format, designed with our care leavers to improve the quality of these plans. The new design was viewed by Ofsted inspectors as part of their monitoring visit in January 2017 and we received positive feedback about the new forms and the engagement and involvement of young people in their own plans.
16. **Overall there are some positive trends in 2016 which are encouraging. However, there is much more to do.** We can't lose sight of the fact that we are still not supporting children in care to do as well as their peers on a range of measures. There can be no complacency about the further improvements needed for children.
17. Priorities for 2017 include tackling inconsistencies in the quality and impact of care plans and pathway plans and widening the use of life story work with children, to help them to understand the events of their lives as they grow up.
18. We will be maintaining a strong focus on specific improvements such as ensuring accessible health histories for care leavers and improved arrangements for overseeing work with children who are at risk of sexual exploitation and children who go missing.
19. Placement stability will remain a priority and we will be looking at further ways to reduce the number of our children placed outside of the Surrey area. We will also be developing our Early Help offer alongside targeted support for adolescents and families to impact on the number of teenagers who are coming into our care.

20. As Lead Member I have been relentless in pursuing improvements for looked after children. I would like to put on the record my appreciation for the commitment that is shown by the staff, colleagues in partner agencies, and all those who work day-in day-out to support children in care and care leavers. I am confident that colleagues will continue to build on improvements and address the areas for development I have identified, so all our looked after children and care leavers are provided with the best possible opportunities and support to achieve to their full potential.

#### **Conclusions:**

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

#### **Recommendations:**

22. That the Committee note the progress and challenges as outlined in the Lead Member's report.
23. 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:**

24. The priorities and actions set out in the report will be progressed through the Corporate Parenting Board's ongoing work in 2017. Any additional actions identified by the Committee will be implemented as agreed.
25. The next Lead Member Annual Report will be produced in March 2018. Meanwhile, there will be further reporting and scrutiny of progress throughout the year. There will also be specific sessions on Corporate Parenting as part of the May 2017 Member induction programme.

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#### **Report contacts:**

Linda Kemeny, Cabinet Member for Schools, Skills and Educational Achievement, linda.kemeny@surreycc.gov.uk

Daniel Shurlock, Senior Manager – Strategy and Performance, 0208 5417681, daniel.shurlock@surreycc.gov.uk

#### **Sources/background papers:**

Children's Act 2004