



Thursday, 11 March 2021

CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT

Purpose of report:

To provide an overview of the service provided to looked after children and care leavers. To include the support and challenge provided by The Corporate Parenting Board and a summary of the data in key areas as compared with national data for the year ending March 2020

Introduction:

1. At the meeting of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee held on 21 January 2020 it was agreed that in future years the Committee would receive a report with regard to Surrey County Council's delivery of Corporate Parenting.
2. It was agreed the service would report in January 2021 as the Department for Education (DFE) release national benchmarking data in November each year for the preceding financial year.
3. As a result of the pandemic the DFE did not release the data until January 2021. The consequence of this delay meant the report was re-scheduled to the March agenda.
4. Following the re-structure of Children's Services in 2019 some key teams and roles were re-aligned to assist practitioners and managers to provide continuity for children & young people. The Virtual School has been given increased resources and moved to Childrens' Social Care to ensure the team around every young person is working together to improve their educational outcomes.
5. The refreshed Improvement plan – 'Getting to Good' - has developed beyond responding to the findings of the 2018 Ofsted Inspection and includes embedding new models of practice; Mockingbird and No Wrong Door being two examples which directly impact on services to looked after children.

Corporate Parenting Board Report

6. The 2020 annual report of the Corporate Parenting Board is attached (see: Annex 1 - Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report v1.0 FINAL). The report details the work undertaken during 2020 and the progress the Board has made against its promise to children.
7. Given for much of the year the national lockdown has been in place, this year Members have been required to challenge the service in terms of how they have responded to meet the needs of children and young people in a different context. Additionally, they have had to adapt how they have undertaken their own roles - for example by maintaining links with their children's home's virtually rather than through the visits they previously made in person.
8. At each meeting the Corporate Parenting Board has received a report detailing the impact of COVID on looked after children and care leavers including areas such as social work visits, emotional & physical health, school attendance and the impact on our foster carers.
9. The report summarises the work of the board both internally within the County Council but also in its role to influence wider stakeholders, external to the County Council to support looked after children and care leavers in Surrey.
10. Local authorities have wide-ranging duties to give due consideration to the wishes and feelings of children in care and care leavers. This applies to decisions and actions affecting children and young people as individuals, and to wider matters concerning children in care and care leavers. As corporate parents, all councillors should take an active interest in how well children in care and care leavers are listened to and how this is acted upon. Care experienced people of all ages have valuable, direct knowledge of how it feels to be in care, and what needs to change for the better. This makes the role of the Corporate Parenting Board distinctly different from that of a Scrutiny Committee - it is meant to be parental, not corporate or strategic. It is clear from the comments received from Ofsted, our former Independent Commissioner and through a Peer Review by Cornwall that our CPB has in the past been too distant from its children and young people, and we have sought to redress that.
11. At the beginning of 2020 the Corporate Parenting Strategy was re-launched. It explicitly set out the Corporate Parenting principles from the 2017 Children and Social Work Act and the Surrey 'Promise' to looked after children and care leavers.
12. The report has therefore measured its progress against the 'Promise'. The forward plan for 2021 is focused on continued improvements in practice and service delivery and delivering on the 'Promise'.
13. The board met six times during 2020 and looked at key themes. It also adapted the agenda to receive updates on the impact of COVID and in July to listen to

young people regarding their views on Black Lives Matter and their wishes for the future.

14. The move to virtual meetings has impacted on opportunities to meet with groups of young people and seek feedback. However during the year the Board has developed a pre-meet with young people to have discussions on the themed areas. This is in addition to the work prepared by the User Voice and Participation team which gathers information including views and recommendations from a larger group of young people across a number of forums.
15. On behalf of all councillors, members of the Corporate Parenting Board support the Celebration Fund and use their enhanced knowledge of the experiences of looked after children and care leavers to ensure awards are made which will be of real benefit to the children, the activities and hobbies they wish to pursue or the educational and career opportunities they are striving to achieve.
16. The details of the money available and a summary of agreed awards are contained within the full report (see Annex 1), along with some examples of awards made. Following a request from the Board to the Leader of the Council, the Celebration Fund will be bolstered in future by £30,000 left over from Members Community Allocations in 2020/21 and this 'nest egg' will enable the Board to enhance its support to children and young people.
17. The Board's ambitions for 2021 demonstrate a commitment to the principle 'is this good enough for my child?' There remains a continued focus on service improvement, and a determination that children and care leavers will not be adversely impacted by COVID. The Board will continue to listen to children and care experienced young people to ensure the services we provide – and improvement to them - are informed by their experiences and developed to meet their needs.

Statutory Data Return for looked after children 2019/20

18. The key performance information and summary of the data each local authority is required to submit for looked after children is attached to this report (see: Annex 2 - Corporate Parenting Data & Performance Information). The Performance Intelligence team have undertaken a comparison of the data, from 18/19 to 19/20 and included benchmarking data for both our statistical neighbours and national performance.
19. Local authorities only submit data for children who have been looked after for twelve months or more.

Overall numbers of looked after children

20. As of 31 March 2020 the number of children looked after by Surrey County Council (SCC) was 981, an increase of 1.1% from the previous year. This resulted in no increase in the rate of children per 10,000 when compared to 2019.
21. Slide 2 shows the rate of children looked after per 10,000 compared to our statistical neighbours and all local authorities nationally.
22. Slide 3 shows the numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children looked after by SCC; the overall number of young people dropped between 2019 and 2020 and this reflects the national picture.
23. Slides 4, 5 and 6 show the types of home that SCC's looked after children live in, how these have changed between 2019 and 2020 and how Surrey compares with statistical neighbours and nationally. Our aspiration is for our looked after children to live within a family setting. However, for some children living in a children's home is the care plan agreed to best meet their needs.
24. Slides 7 and 8 show the distance children live from home. This is measured in two ways including those living within a 20-mile radius from their home address or those within the county.
25. Providing sufficient homes for looked after children within the county and reducing the distance from home is a priority for the service. The work being undertaken to address this important priority is contained within the Sufficiency Strategy which was revised in 2020.
26. The Health of Children in Care is a priority for the Board. There has been an increase in children who received dental checks year-on-year, which is positive. The number of Review Health Assessments that have been completed has also increased by 1.0%. It was 90.0% and 91.0% for 2019 and 2020 respectively. Given the change in access to NHS services in the pandemic, it will be challenging to continue to achieve these %s, but the Board has already made challenges up to National level through the Health representative on the Safeguarding Executive.
27. The final slide gives an overview of the data set. It shows a mixed picture in terms of improvement in service delivery over the last two years. It can also be seen in some areas that Surrey performs better than our statistical neighbours and LAs nationally.

28. Detailed action plans are in place to deliver improvements. There is however no doubt the impact of COVID will be seen in a number of indicators for 20/21.

Conclusions:

29. The Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board demonstrates the impact it has over a wide range of issues. As a result of the pandemic the Board has adapted to new working requirements but has maintained its focus on listening to children and young people within the restrictions of the virtual world.
30. The data report provides Members with the performance outcomes for children looked after by Surrey and demonstrates how it compares with both statistical neighbours and nationally.
31. Improvements in performance can be seen in some areas. Clear plans are in place where current performance does not meet the expected targets.

Recommendations:

32. The Select Committee notes the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report and Performance Report in relation to looked after children.
33. The Select Committee receives a report next year which will include an update on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the development of both the work of the Corporate Parenting Board and the key performance data for looked after children as compared with statistical neighbours and nationally.

Next steps:

34. Ofsted have resumed a new round of Focused Visits ('assurance visits') which include a focus on how the local authority has adapted services to meet the needs of children and its statutory duties during the pandemic. Dates cannot be given as the visits are unannounced.

Report contact

Tina Benjamin, Director of Corporate Parenting

Contact details

07976 205282 / tina.benjamin@surreycc.gov.uk

Sources/background papers

- Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report
- Local Government Association Corporate Parenting: Resource Pack

Annexes

Annex 1 – Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

Annex 2 – Corporate Parenting Data and Performance Information

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