

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

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Foreword

As Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families and Lead Member for Children's Service in Surrey, I am pleased to introduce the 2020 Annual Report of Surrey's Corporate Parenting Board.

During the last year the Corporate Parenting Board has continued to build on the improvements made since the 2018 Ofsted inspection and delivered the significant changes needed as we progress on our improvement journey.

As a Board we have sought to understand the lived experience of children growing up in the care of the council and of care experienced young people to ensure they are safe, healthy and leading happy and fulfilling lives. Feedback from children and young people, particularly through our User Voice & Participation Team has an essential role in shaping what we do, the priorities of the Board and how we tackle challenges and embed improvements into practice.

We started 2020 with the Lead Member for Children's Services, the Director of Children's Services and Corporate Parenting Board members writing to all 500 elected councillors about Working Together to Safeguard Children and the Corporate Parenting Principles. This exemplifies the scale of our ambition as a Corporate Parenting Board to spread our influence widely across Surrey.

This has been a challenging year due to the impact of the pandemic but this has not reduced our ambition and drive to improve services at pace and our work has continued using new and innovative techniques this year.

The Board is comprised of Members, Officers and Carers dedicated to improving the lives of children and young people and keep us focussed on the lived experiences of children in care and young people that have left care. I would like to thank them for their help and commitment to the work of the Board and their commitment as corporate parents.

This annual report provides a summary of the business of the Board and includes an overview of the themes we have focussed on throughout 2020, the core values we bring to our work and the progress against our Pledge.



Councillor Mary Lewis

Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families

Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board

Summary Position Statement

This report draws together the range of activities and impact of the Corporate Parenting Board over the last year. It has been an unprecedented year. The challenges we have all faced as a result of the pandemic have naturally been an area of focus as we have adapted to the various restrictions placed on us and therefore the manner in which we have delivered services. In doing so we have listened to children and young people and are aware that there are some parts of the 'virtual world' they enjoy, and we are keen to learn lessons and use new ways of working once all of the restrictions are lifted.

In my opinion, the engagement of young people with board members has been one of the areas that has benefitted from the increased use of technology. Board members have welcomed the opportunity to have both informal conversations and themed discussions to support planned agenda items.

We have endeavoured to ensure the pandemic has not prevented the development of services, and the service remains committed to the promise made to our looked after children and young people.

Tina Benjamin,

Director for Corporate Parenting

Corporate Parenting Board Roles and Functions

Lead Member of Children's Services (LMCS) Role

The LMCS has a statutory role that was established in the Children Act 2004. The LMCS 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 involved or responsible for operational management of Children's Services and Education. The role is 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 LMCS to provide an annual update to Members on how we are meeting our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB), chaired by the LMCS, provides robust assurance of the whole corporate parenting system, ensures children in Surrey receive outstanding corporate parenting; and that all looked after children and care leavers can achieve their potential. The Board champions and monitors the corporate parenting strategy and helps to drive its implementation.

The Board of cross-party members and senior managers meets bi-monthly, receiving reports, including performance reports, undertaking strategic and thematic enquiry into specific elements of the strategy, and seeking ways of resolving barriers to its success. Collectively and individually, Board members engage regularly with children, young people,

staff and carers to help to further develop their understanding of issues affecting our looked after children and care leavers.

The CPB met six times in 2020, considering reports on the following themes:

- Education
- Criminal Exploitation and Missing
- Care Leavers
- Permanency and placement stability
- Sufficiency
- Education
- Placement Stability for Looked After Children
- COVID-19 Impact, Arrangements and Recovery

Corporate Parenting Operational Group

The Surrey Corporate Parenting Operational Group (CPOG) is a multi-agency forum which represents the agencies in Surrey who are responsible for delivering good and effective corporate parenting for children and young people looked after by the local authority, as well as those young people leaving local authority care.

The primary aim of CPOG is to implement the Corporate Parenting Strategy, and ensure that appropriate services are in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of all looked after children and care leavers, and enable this group of children and young people to make positive choices and achieve the best possible outcomes during their time in care and into adulthood.

Corporate Parenting Strategy

The [Corporate Parenting Strategy](#), refreshed in 2020, guided our priorities throughout the year. The strategy outlines our vision for children and young people looked after by the council, or formerly in care, and the values which inform the way we meet our corporate parenting responsibilities. Drawing on the requirements of the Social Work Act 2017 and the seven principles any local authority must consider, it sets out our priorities and the actions we will take to ensure that no child looked after by the council is 'left behind'. The Strategy was developed in consultation with children and young people, carers and staff both from the County Council and from partner agencies.

The LMCS presented the refreshed Strategy to the Surrey Safeguarding Children's Executive, challenging them to disseminate it within their organisations. We continued to make further requests for dissemination of the Strategy throughout the year in all agencies so that it becomes embedded in the way everyone works.

Young People's Version of the Strategy

Our User Voice and Participation (UVP) team, including a number of care experienced apprentices helped to produce a [young-people friendly version](#) of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020. This version of the Strategy was developed by young people for young people.

Care Council Junior discussed the strategy document in groups over a period of a few months in small bitesize pieces. They directed the UVP Team on the edits and suggestions,

until they were happy with the final version. Care Council Junior 'approved' the final version, which was then taken back to CPOG and the CPB.

Young People's Feedback to Corporate Parents

Since July 2020, a panel with young people has been held before each CPB meeting to ensure the views of the young people are the focus of the meeting. They have given feedback to CPB on the following themes:

- Terminology and Language
- Black Lives Matter
- Education
- Placement Stability
- Independent Reviewing Service

Our Care Council and Care Council Junior groups also provide a presentation to the Board focusing on each theme. The presentation includes videos, audio and quotes from young people and is framed around what is working well and what needs to be improved. We also ask the question 'if you were in charge what would you do?'. These presentations are shared before the CPB, but also played in the meeting to ensure the CPB have the views of young people at the centre of their decision making. These are also saved and shared on a CPB Microsoft Teams page for reference.

We previously held CPB away days for Care Council members and CPB Members to build relationships. It was not possible to do this in person this year due to Covid-19, so we held a CPB Virtual away day which included games, quizzes and consultation. This helped all the members learn more about the CPB and how they can work together better.

All CPB members completed Member profiles to help young people to understand their roles and know who to contact if they wished. This again has built a friendly working environment for both members and Care Council members to share their views.

As part of National Care Leavers' Week, a number of CPB members participated in the 'Reality Cheque Challenge', set by the UVP team. They lived on the average disposable income of a care leaver, £24, for five days, recording their experiences in a daily diary alongside providing photos of the meals they were able to prepare. The UVP team created a [video](#) including the experiences and feedback of some of those who took part. The Challenge helped Surrey staff to understand some of the challenges our care leavers face.

By moving to a virtual platform, we are more able to involve young people in meetings through Microsoft Teams, Zoom and also online chat. Feedback from young people tells us that they find it less daunting on a virtual platform than in a County Hall meeting. Moving forward, we would like to continue to include a virtual element in meetings.

In February 2020, we launched Our Voice Matters, an online survey created in partnership with the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) and aimed at all children and young people living in Surrey. We received 1,207 responses, and the feedback has been used across the partnership to define priority areas. One outcome was a task and finish group looking at the impact of social media on our most vulnerable young people in Surrey, which resulted in funding being agreed for a Child Exploitation and Online Protection training plan for practitioners.

We have created an action card database with feedback from our looked after children, young people and care leavers. Action cards are raised by young people or CPB members to raise an issue they would like to be resolved. There is a clear process and the CPOG is responsible for ensuring actions are resolved and improve practice. Action cards are allocated to senior leaders and should be responded to within 2 months.

162 young people responded to the Big Survey, an annual survey that is sent to all looked after children and care leavers, telling us their views on a range of issues such as placement stability, education and leisure activities. Care Council members presented the findings to the CPB and agreed action cards to improve practice. Multi-agency partners contributed to the questions and feedback was shared with Health, Police and Education colleagues. Big survey findings in turn created the themes for CPOG meetings and meetings are focused around the action cards.

Celebrating Young People

At the end of the year the User Voice & Participation Team in Surrey normally arranges the Oscarz, Empowering You and YES Awards for children and young people in the care system, those with mental health needs and those with disabilities and additional needs. This year, due to the pandemic, the UVP Team instead celebrated the successes of all young people linked to Surrey with a virtual awards ceremony in December. The award categories for the Recognising You Awards were; Achievement; Contribution; Perseverance and Progress.

Surrey children in care and care leavers were among the 518 children and young people nominated by peers and professionals, and we saw a number of children's homes attending the virtual event from the communal areas within homes, as well as foster carers and the children they care for from their own homes. The evening included high-level aspirational messages for children in care and care leavers in Surrey from a range of people, including former Prime Ministers.

Member Practice Conversations

We established a programme of 'Member Practice Conversations' in 2018 to support the CPB to listen, understand and act upon the experiences of children, young people, parents, carers and front-line practitioners. The conversations also provide opportunities for those people to further understand the role of CPB members and for CPB members to identify and explore wider system issues impacting on the care, support and experience those people receive and/or deliver.

These 'conversations' have continued this year – albeit in a more limited and virtual way – and have helped to ensure the collective system is delivering on our promises and commitments to children and families, ensuring that they receive the best possible care and support to reach their potential. They provide evidence of child, carer, parent and practitioner insight and experience, and are used to inform discussions at future CPB meetings, and shape assurance and decision-making that improves services and support for children.

Member Residential Home Visits

As part of ongoing quality assurance arrangements CPB Councillors undertake regular visits to Surrey's children's residential homes. Each CPB Member is 'buddied' with an individual home, and one CPB Member makes regular visits to secure accommodation. The visits help

us to further understand the experiences of staff, carers and children, and the quality of practice children receive. They also enable staff, carers and children to raise good news stories and general concerns independent of the operational service. Issues raised during these visits are then followed up on. For example, as a result the Director of Property attended a CPB meeting and then increased the priority of repairs to Children's Homes.

Celebration Fund Panel

All councillors at Surrey County Council are committed to being good corporate parents and this means they will support children and young people in care and leaving care to achieve their potential. To help with this there is a small, discretionary fund that our corporate parents have set aside to:

- Support a child/young person pursue a hobby or interest;
- Participate in a one-off activity that will really benefit a child/young person's overall wellbeing;
- Provide a child/young person with some additional 'equipment' to help be independent/achieve a goal;
- Go on a visit, trip or excursion (e.g. school trip); or
- Celebrate achievements.

For the year 2019/2020, all members were asked to contribute £250 from their community allocation funds. A total of £12,508 was received from 47 members. Over the course of the year, £9,684.80 of the fund was spent with the remainder carried forward for future awards from the Celebration Fund. A total of **48 awards were approved by the Panel last year**, including 14 day trips, 14 pieces of equipment to support hobbies, 8 lessons/training sessions and 8 bikes.

A total of £9,940 was received from 42 members for the year 2020/2021. The fund for the year totals approximately £12,583 due to the £2,643.20 carry forward from the previous financial year. The Leader has also committed to transfer all under-spent Member Community Allowances to the fund this year. A total of 114 applications have been submitted to the Panel, and **58 awards have been approved so far this year**.

We use our experiences at the Celebration Fund Panel to understand the needs of children and young people in care and leaving care. For example, we have agreed a standard offer for computers and driving lessons, and we are currently working on a standard offer for bicycles.

Impact of Covid-19 on the functioning of Corporate Parenting

Despite continuing to drive improvement, the Covid-19 pandemic has inevitably had a major impact on the delivery of frontline services and the CPB have supported frontline services to manage the effects of this wherever possible. For example, an emergency centre for unaccompanied asylum seekers (UASC) and other new entrants to care was set up within just a couple of weeks. Key principles have continued to underpin our work during these exceptional times:

- Child-Centred - Promoting children's best interests: nothing is more important than children's welfare; children who need help and protection deserve high-quality and effective support as soon as a need for help is identified;
- Risk-Based - Prioritising support and resources for children at greatest risk;
- Family-Focused - Harnessing the strengths in families and their communities;

- Evidence-Informed - Ensuring decisions are proportionate and justified;
- Collaborative - Working in partnership with parents and other professionals;
- Transparent - Providing clarity and maintaining professional curiosity about a child's wellbeing

We continued to restore services through 2020, and although the second national lockdown starting in November presented additional challenges for the delivery of Children's Services, arrangements were quickly put in place to reduce the impact. The Service did not return to virtual visiting during the second national lockdown, and contact centres also remained open with some moderations to ensure adherence to public health advice. As of 18 December 2020, 82% of Looked After Children have been visited (face to face) within timescales. Statutory reviews were undertaken under a hybrid model with the majority remaining virtual; this was similar for PEPs and Health Assessments. The majority of children returned to school in September 2020, with the overall absence rates reported as 7.8%.

Demand for services increased dramatically in 2020, and there has been an increase in children coming into care during lockdown, specifically teenagers on section 20 (voluntary) agreements. The overall number of children looked after in Surrey was 1019 at the end of October 2020, 5% higher than at the same point the previous year. Over 100 children came into the care system in the last three months of 2020 alone. It is testament to the hard work of staff that the Service was able to maintain strong performance in many areas.

Covid-19 had a significant effect on our day-to-day work throughout 2020 - in the increases in demand and workload coming into the service, the challenges we have around staffing compounding the workload issue and the practical difficulties in delivering frontline services during a pandemic. Despite this we are continuing to fulfil our statutory safeguarding obligations and our focus continues to be on delivering the essential work to support Surrey's residents, to safeguard children and to maintain consistency across frontline services wherever possible.

Our Vision and Values

Our corporate parenting vision is:

To be the best corporate parents we can be, working together to provide children and young people in our care with happy and healthy childhoods, helping them reach and exceed their potential and aspirations, and supporting them into successful adulthood.

The values we bring to help us realise our vision are:

- We must be the strongest champions of and advocates for all our looked after children and care leavers.
- We should have positive regard for all looked after children and care leavers and make sure that all are nurtured, feel loved and supported.
- Looked after children and care leavers are 'our' children and young people and we must have strong ambitions and aim high for all.
- All our young people are individuals and unique and we must parent each child as such.
- We must build trusting relationships with our children and young people so they feel able to give us their views and can talk to us about their wishes and feelings, their anxieties and hopes.

- We must listen to our children and young people and take account of their views on all matters which affect them.
- We must be resilient and persistent parents with an uncompromising approach to doing the best for our children and young people and a willingness to 'go the extra mile'.
- We want to continuously improve as corporate parents and continuously improve outcomes for our young people.

Our Promise to Looked After Children and Care Leavers

We developed a promise to our young people through our conversations with looked after children and care leavers about their expectations of us as corporate parents. Our current promise consists of five elements:

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

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

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

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

To keep you safe and ensure that you feel safe.

Our Progress Against Our Pledge

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

The council has a duty, as defined in the Children Act 1989, to secure, as far as reasonably practical, enough accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority is looking after. This means having enough of the right accommodation and services, in the right places, to effectively support Surrey's children, young people and families. The [Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2025](#) outlines our vision for looked after children provision in Surrey and the actions we need to take to ensure all our children in care achieve the best possible outcomes in Surrey. Our vision:

- Ensure children in care live in family homes where possible
- Create more Surrey Homes for Surrey Children
- Ensure homes are of the highest quality
- Ensure there are a wide range of placements for diverse needs
- Support moves to independence

Aligned to the principles and priorities set out in our Sufficiency Strategy, capital funding has been secured for two new Community Children's Homes, including one 'No Wrong Door'

place, as part of moving towards a model of smaller 'ordinary homes' and increasing the numbers of our looked after children who are able to live within the county and close to their communities. The proposed works are due to commence in 2021 for completion and occupation by June 2022. There are further plans for a third new Children's Home with another 'No Wrong Door' place, that will seek approval in February 2021.

In 2020, we introduced an initiative to use capital spend to support care leavers, agreeing our first in house care leaver accommodation, and we will seek approval for a second in February 2021.

Permanency

Surrey Children's Services aims to secure permanence for all children in a timely manner that is led by the individual needs of each child and affords each child the opportunity to reach their full potential. A thematic audit of our work to secure permanency for children found that there has been a notable improvement in tracking and reviewing permanence and subsequently there was no longer drift and delay in legal proceedings. This aspect of permanency appears much improved and is on track to be good enough for our children.

Surrey's adoption service joined the Regional Adoption Agency on the 1st April. However, nationally adoption rates have fallen and this is also the case for Surrey. The number of placement orders achieved through the courts is quite low and as a result of this Surrey does not perform particularly well regionally with regards to how many young people are placed in adoption.

Placement Stability

Young people told the CPB about the importance of placement stability, and the Board also received a report on placement stability in November. Our short-term placement stability performance has remained on target and is quite consistent across all quadrants, with 9% of our children looked after for less than one year having no more than 3 placement moves. It is clear that we need to improve our performance in terms of long-term placement stability, which has declined below our target of 70% (children who have been looked after for at least 2.5 years have been in their current placement for over two years) since July 2019, particularly in the North East and North West quadrants. There are a number of comprehensive measures that are underway that will positively impact on both short and long-term stability, these include:

- No Wrong Door: a one stop shop that offers effective, flexible multi-agency support to older children and their families when in crisis, to support young people to stay out of care. We are optimistic that this project will have a positive impact on placement stability for our older children.
- NSPCC Reunification Programme: provides a framework that supports practitioners and managers to apply structured professional judgement to decisions about whether and how a child should return home from care.
- Foster Carer Recruitment: Work is underway to increase the Mockingbird scheme with additional hubs, with the third hub launched in August, and feedback from those foster carers involved indicates that it provides a truly supportive network to the benefit of both children in care and their carers. We are working to recruit more carers able to care for older children and those with more complex needs and to

recruit specialist carers including carers to be attached to the Hope Service to look after children with complex mental health needs.

- Better permanency planning: We have invested in two new posts for Permanency Planning Managers to ensure that we have a consistent approach to achieving permanence as soon as possible for our looked after children. The managers are also working to encourage foster carers to consider legal permanent options (Special Guardianship or adoption) for children that have been with them for a long time
- Improvements to the Gateway Service: We recruited a new permanent Service Manager to manage the Gateway Service, to bring management stability to the service and enable continued progress and improvements, Work is underway to ensure that we have a strength based and multi-agency approach to our placement finding.
- Surrey SEND improvements: Surrey SEND is undergoing a comprehensive improvement programme that will positively impact on placement stability for children with special educational needs.

We still have some challenges in terms of our staffing and achieving consistently high-quality work for all children ensuring the best outcomes, but this is an improving picture with much focus on the recruitment and retention of high-quality staff. We are continuing to strive to improve the quality of our court work to reduce the incidences of our plans not being accepted by the court. The November 2020 report highlighted a largely positive picture with a real chance of us being able to maintain our target for short term stability and achieve our target for long term stability in the next 12 months.

We launched the Fostering Support Line in February 2020 to further support Surrey's foster carers outside office hours. This service sits alongside, and in partnership with, the Emergency Duty Team (EDT), to offer support, advice and guidance to foster carers 6pm-11pm Monday to Friday and 10am-11pm during weekends and bank holidays. It is staffed by members of the Fostering Service who opt into the rota. This means that the carers often know the person at the end of the phone when they are needing support. The support line has been well received by carers who may need guidance and advice without wanting to burden the EDT service. Although its use is sporadic, carers appreciate the reassurance of having it there and the knowledge that their queries and needs will be responded to when needed.

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

The council has a statutory duty to promote contact between looked after children and their parents, siblings and significant members of their kinship network. Preserving relationships and maintaining contact is a central part of all care planning and placement settings including adoption, fostering and residential homes.

Social Workers regularly discuss with children and young people maintaining contact safely with the important people in their lives. This is captured in the care plans of all our children and young people and is considered during looked after review meetings. We want to equip our children and young people to be able to make good decisions about contact with the people important to them and think about what those relationships might look like as young

people move through adolescence and into independence. We are mindful that arrangements which are implemented for young children might not always be the right arrangements as young people get older and we respond accordingly to those requests. Where it is possible to make safe changes we will do so and where this is not the right plan we will talk with children and young people about what has led us to that decision.

In some cases, there is a need to supervise this family time. We have completed a restructure of the Supervised Contact Service and a new service delivery model will go live in January 2021. We have created a permanent staff structure and introduced new roles so that there is sufficient management oversight and to provide a career progression structure for staff. Policy, procedures, processes and practice are being reviewed so that the service supports the practice improvement journey and is in line with developments across Surrey's Children's Services such as the Family Safeguarding Model.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the Contact service proved its flexible and adaptable nature by ensuring that children were still able to have Virtual contact through Skype & Zoom whilst face to face contact was not an option. The service responded extremely quickly to changes in Government guidance to reinstate face to face contact in the community and in both contact centres where there was considerable risk around contact in the community.

The Contact service responds to the needs of the child and embeds the voice of the child through gaining feedback and responding to concerns; we will continue to build relationships with foster carers and the area teams to ensure supervised contact is a positive experience for all and that children's wellbeing is safeguarded and promoted at all times.

We are planning to open a purpose-built Contact Centre in 2021 to facilitate meaningful contact in a homely environment, whilst also providing suitable office and meeting room space for professionals. The plans have been carefully designed to provide a safe environment for families, children, staff and carers. There are further plans for a second Contact Centre.

We keep in touch with everyone who has contact with looked after children, including residential staff, foster carers and Independent Review Officers (IROs). For example, the LMCS has continued to maintain contact with IROs by making a Recommendation 41 visit to the IRO service and hearing from the Service Managers about how the improvement is going from a child's point of view.

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

Children's and young people's **participation in the decision-making processes** of their lives is fundamental and directly related to good outcomes. Young people tell us that review meetings work well when they are chaired by the young person and they have an element of control in the meeting. Throughout the period between March 2019 and April 2020, over 90% of children participated in their Looked After Child Reviews. We have commissioned an advocacy service for children through Coram Voice. In addition to formal reviews, progress updates between reviews now include children, ensuring it is the child who guides the Independent Chairs challenge. Independent Chairs have also changed how they write their reports, beginning to write these directly to children, making them more accessible to them now and in the future.

Work has been progressed to develop a Welcome Pack which supports children and young people who have become Looked After in understanding more about the Looked After world.

We are in the process of gaining feedback about the pack and would envisage this being signed off in March 2021.

Each child and young person in care has a termly **Personal Education Plan (PEP)** where they share their views and feelings about their education, and the team around them (social worker, foster carer, Designated Teacher for children in care and health professionals where appropriate) together plan what support is needed to meet their individual needs.

In 2018, OFSTED recommended that the local authority urgently improve the quality of its PEPs. This has been a key focus of the Virtual School, with a number of measures introduced to improve timeliness and quality. The 5-point quality assurance system introduced in 2019 has contributed to a consistent termly improvement in the quality of PEPs, despite PEPs being undertaken virtually for the majority of 2020. The completion rate has also significantly improved, and was at 91% for the 2020 summer term period.

Our aim is that we would want children and young people to feel they own their PEPs and should be chairing them. The Virtual School has taken on board the feedback from UVP members which identified that PEPs are not always shared with the child or young person, and that some looked after children do not feel that PEPs helped their education (Big Survey 2020). This has been shared with Designated Teachers, and Care Council groups have been visited to understand children and young people's views and experiences of this. During 2020-21 the Virtual School will focus on maintaining consistency regarding the timeliness and quality of PEPs, and securing further improvement.

The Virtual School has introduced a new **Pupil Premium Plus (PPP)** policy and monitoring system, linked directly with the quality of PEPs, introducing a greater level of quality assurance and monitoring around the ways in which PPP is spent. We are conducting a full analysis of PPP spend and impact to help us fully understand the impact PPP funding is making on our Surrey looked after children's progress and outcomes. This has included specific consultation with children and young people through Care Council groups.

The CPB works closely with the Virtual School. The Cabinet Member for All Age Learning, a member of the CPB, chairs the Virtual School Governing Body, of which the LMCS is also a member. Through the Governing Body, they have continued to follow up on the strong challenges from the CPB for improvement to PEPs and PPP. They were involved in the recruitment of the new Virtual School Headteacher, who was invited to become a full member of the CPB in 2020 to ensure that education is given a strong focus by the CPB.

Service Managers within the Looked After service have been running workshops in respect of pathway planning, both in terms of the content of the pathway plan and also the technical understanding of progressing the pathway within LCS. Service Managers have used the feedback from the thematic audit to inform the sessions being delivered. It has also been hugely beneficial to receive guidance from colleagues in the Care Leavers part of the service about how to improve the quality of pathway plans. This has occurred as a natural part of team meetings between the two services. We are also mindful of sharing our expertise with colleagues in Safeguarding Adolescents and Children with Disabilities to support them in the development of high quality pathway plans.

The [Care Leavers Local Offer](#) was updated this year – in consultation with young people – and reflects what care leavers have told us they need (rather than what we think is needed). The local offer for care leavers outlines the support in six areas:

- Health and wellbeing
- Relationships

- Education and training
- Employment
- Accommodation
- Participation

We want all care leavers to know that as they begin to live independently, we still care about them and what is happening in their lives. We know that leaving care can be difficult at times so our offer sets out clearly what care leavers can expect from us and where they can find other useful help and support.

In June 2020 we launched the '**Care Leavers' Forum'**; a new group for young people aged 18+. It provides an open space for them to talk about any issues they may be facing, access support services, influence service delivery and meet other young people who may be in similar situations to them. Although we have been unable to meet face-to-face this year, the group still gets together every month in a virtual capacity. Here is what young people have said about attending the group:

- *"The session was really good. I thought I would be nervous, but my confidence has grown and will continue to grow the more I attend".*
- *"Everyone was really friendly and was open with their experiences which helped me to open up".*
- *"The group has pushed me to have conversations with people in the same position - it's refreshing".*

We are working on the allocation of **Personal Advisors (PAs)** for children at 16 years. When this work started in November, the allocation of PAs for children at 16 years was at 4%. By December, this had increased to 34%. This work will continue, and plans are in place to ensure the most vulnerable 16 year old looked after children are allocated a PA. Sufficiency in housing and stepdown post 18 remains a challenge and the role of the PAs at 16 yrs is critical to contribute towards the formulation of the pathway planning process and how young people understand the housing entitlement. PAs also offer guidance and support in pathways to education and apprenticeships.

An additional team of PAs has been set up, focusing specifically on UASC. The team will provide greater specialist support, and also reduce the overall Personal Advisor caseload, enabling the PAs to spend more time and develop better relationships with the young people assigned to them.

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

Our analysis of outcomes for children reaching the end of a key stage can only be based on 2019 end of key stage results and the period from September 2019 to March 2020 due to the cancellation of end of Key Stage assessments. For children in the Primary phase, Performance was strong during 2019 across all the prime areas of learning for Early Years Foundation Years and Key Stage 1, above national Children Looked After (CLA) results. The 2019 report to CPB highlighted that the progress of children between Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 had been variable.

Although there were not any nationally published Key Stage 4 results or a Local Authority level school results collection in 2020, the Virtual School undertook its own collection as corporate parent, contacting carers of the 127 young people on the roll of Year 11 during

2019-20. There has been a significant improvement in GCSE outcomes this year, with outcomes exceeding the national CLA average for 2019 in the measure of children achieving grades 4-9 and 5-9 in both English and Maths. The Virtual School is undertaking a specific Year 11 project to ensure that all young people leave school with English and maths qualifications so that they are not disadvantaged on their onward journey to education, employment or training. It should be noted that trend comparisons between years should be treated with caution given the use of centre assessed grades and/or an algorithm this year.

There has been significant improvement in school placement and stability, with a reduction in the number of children missing education. School attendance for Surrey's looked after children has been excellent with overall attendance of over 90% for the first half-term of the 2020/21 academic year. 42% of our children in care (248 children) have a 100% attendance record for the entire half-term. This achievement combines the efforts of children and young people who are dedicated to their education, carers, schools and their Designated Teachers, Social Workers and the Surrey Virtual School, who are all working in partnership to promote the importance of education in the lives of children who are looked after by Surrey County Council.

Surrey worked with the Department for Education (DfE) to help provide laptops to disadvantaged families, children and young people, and the Virtual School supplemented the DfE laptop scheme with its own top up laptop scheme.

Young People articulated their experience of leaving care in a video for the CPB, reflecting that overall it was improving. Some young people would like more support to live independently and expand their independence skills before reaching adulthood (Big Survey 2020). The Board recognises that children must be prepared for leaving care from a much earlier age, and we are developing an Independent Skills Programme to support the transition of young people into adulthood with the ambition of ensuring that all of our young people are confident in their skills at the age of 18. Young people will be able to access a variety of modules, including modules that enable them to evidence their independence skills, such as budgeting or managing a housing tenancy. The small group of young people that tested out elements of the programme in the summer of 2020 provided positive feedback, residential colleagues have started to use the programme and we intend to trial this in one of the quadrants before a fuller roll out in 2021 across the authority.

One of the key issues is accommodation options after the age of 18. We recognise this can be an unsettling time for many young people but that can be heightened for Care Leavers. Our current focus is on ensuring that all eligible young people are registered for Housing at 16, and we are monitoring the progress of this. We also want conversations to take place earlier about post-18 options, to ensure that young people are clear about what their options are and how to achieve them. This is supported by our Sufficiency Strategy, focussing on local accommodation options for our children, mobilising the local support and family network and creating a community around the young person that will be there into adulthood.

Three-quarters of care leavers responding to the Our Voice Matters Survey felt well equipped with careers advice, above the general population of young people in Surrey in our survey, and there are now fewer young people not in post 16 education, employment and training (NEET). However, some young people tell us that they would like further support regarding careers advice, guidance and higher education. There is work underway to support young people into employment, such as the development of a Careers Passport, a document sent to young people to capture their skills, qualifications and career aspirations. In a pilot with the Surrey Chambers of Commerce, six career passports were sent to them, and five young people received offers of CV support, and two were linked to employers for

advice. As of December 2020, 12 young people were enrolled on the programme and the Virtual School will be alongside the User Voice & Participation Team over the next year to develop these opportunities further. The Virtual School hosted a virtual programme of training workshops for carers, drawing on specific issues previously raised, for example access to bursaries and funding for further education.

Care Leavers generally live independently at a much younger age than their peers, and often become responsible for their finances without a family support network to rely on. Surrey County Council agreed a Council Tax exemption for care leavers in 2019, which came into effect in 2020. Offering support with Council Tax for Care Leavers helps to provide immediate financial assistance and helps to reduce the risk of debt and potential homelessness. We know from feedback from our Care Leavers the significant difference this can make to their lives as they move into adulthood. We have secured similar Council Tax exemptions across 8 of the 11 Districts and Boroughs in Surrey, and continue to lobby the 3 remaining to do so.

To keep you safe and ensure that you feel safe

Surrey's vision for safeguarding adolescents is child centred, strengths based and integrated. Our current programme of work with Children's Services supports staff to identify, assess, plan and intervene effectively and to work in partnership to safeguard and disrupt all forms of child exploitation.

The targeted roll out of training and knowledge of the missing children process for staff has clearly had a positive impact and there are plans to continue this in the online learning space.

We have seen these positive impacts though increased recording on our case recording systems and improvement in information sharing with the police. Multiple missing episodes remain a high concern and there continues to be ongoing work between the police and Children's Services to ensure advance planning and risk management is in place.

In addition to this, we have established a clear process for young people placed out of Surrey who are reported missing and require a Return Home Interview (RHI), that includes staff guidance and training to ensure a consistent understanding.

We are currently reaching over 80% of our children with a RHI and over 90% receive the offer of such an interview within 72 hours. The challenge is that there is currently a higher portion of CLA within this cohort. 47% of children missing from home or care are missing from Care, a rise during COVID restrictions of approximately 10%. This then also increases the percentage of episodes relating to CLA.

Regarding exploitation, CLA are currently a very low percentage, under 20% of the full cohort. It is useful to note the gender split of these children is around 50/50.

A range of events have been held to raise awareness of exploitation both within Surrey County Council and through the Partnership, targeting the wider community. We have worked with partners to ensure the service model is integrated and we have developed a disruption plan template to support partnership work in the targeting of perpetrators of these challenging crimes and abuse.

The needs of children at risk of exploitation are included in a clear workforce learning and development plan that reflects the needs of the partnership and the Safeguarding Adolescents workforce. Modules include contextual safeguarding, systemic family therapy

and trauma informed practice, as well as Motivational Interviewing and Relationship based practice. We are also supporting a clear understanding of Safety and disruption planning through 2021.

The number of children with a completed Initial Health Assessment (IHA) was at 84% in January 2020, exceeding the target of 80%, and this has remained relatively stable throughout the year with 87% completed in December 2020. The increases in the number of children coming into care in Surrey this year, along with the impacts of the pandemic, have made it challenging to always complete IHAs within timescales and at December 2020 58% have been completed in time.

Restrictions in place to address Covid-19 have resulted in a continued decrease in the proportions of children who have had an up to date dental check. We are working with our health partners to address this, reminding dentists of their responsibilities related to looked after children, and raising the issue at regional and national forums.

In October 2019 Surrey was awarded funding by NHS England to implement a Personal Health Budgets (PHBs) pilot for a limited number of CLA who were hard to engage with CAMHS and/or placed out of county. This pilot project was successfully delivered in April 2020. Following implementation, Surrey Heartlands CCGs continued to fund the project and extend the offer to additional children from a similar cohort. As of December 2020, around thirty children have been referred to the service (including those currently being processed). NHS England have acknowledged the Surrey approach as good practice and included this in their interim report.

Independent visitors (IVs), a statutory service under Children Act 1989, are volunteer befrienders for children in care who visit the children monthly and do a variety of activities together, although Covid-19 restrictions have limited the range of activities. By the end of 2019, we were supporting 72 IVs, and 74 children were matched with IVs. Having the IV Service in-house enables consistency and continuity for our looked after children, with 47 IVs supporting children and working with the IV service for over two years, and 35 children meeting with their IV for over two years. A key challenge for the service is meeting the demand for the service given the current service capacity.

Looking forward

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is to inquire and understand; set ambition; and to champion and challenge our collective care of looked after children and care leavers. This is an assurance role that sits alongside multi agency operational work and organisational scrutiny. It is informed by our experts, our practitioners, children and young people and carers.

Throughout the next year we will continue to deliver on our pledge to children in care and care leavers, maintaining oversight of our corporate parenting services while also focussing on six key themes when we meet:

- Exploitation and missing
- Preparing for independence
- Health and wellbeing
- Education, employment and training
- Placements, sufficiency and permanence
- Leisure, culture and life skills

In the year ahead, we are looking forward to expanding on initiatives with the support of a Corporate Parenting Board Manager. For example, in 2020, following a discussion with the University for the Creative Arts, they established a £1000 bursary for care leavers. We look forward to expanding on similar initiatives.

We have a number of challenges in the year ahead, particularly related to the ongoing impacts from the pandemic, but we are committed to tackle these head-on to ensure we are continuing to drive improvements in the way we support children and young people in Surrey.

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Appendix 1: Corporate Parenting Board Membership

Councillor Mary Lewis (Chair)	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families, SCC
Councillor Julie Iles	Cabinet Member for All Age Learning, SCC
Councillor Clare Curran	SCC
Councillor Jonathan Essex	SCC
Councillor Chris Botten	SCC
Councillor Richard Walsh	SCC
Councillor Nick Darby	SCC
Councillor Marissa Heath	SCC
Councillor Jeff Harris	SCC
Jane Porter	Foster Carer
Cindy Morris	Care Experienced Foster Carer
Linda Grover	Foster Carer
Rachael Wardell	Executive Director – Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
Jo Rabbitte	Assistant Director – Children’s Resources
Tina Benjamin	Director – Corporate Parenting
Joanna Killian	Chief Executive
Jo Lang	Service Manager for Customer Engagement
Howard Bromley	Programme Manager
Anwen Foy	Headteacher Surrey Virtual School