

Cabinet Member Update

Councillor Mary Lewis

Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families

Despite a challenging 6 months where our work to support children and families has been impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic, I'm pleased to be able to provide an update to colleagues today on a number of recent achievements:

Our work to improve and transform our services has not stopped and the challenges of the last few months have led to some innovative approaches to reaching people most in need of support; our extended out-of-hours and safeguarding services – particularly for teenagers and their families – have been a critical part of the support offer and led to some major changes that will be kept in place permanently. We know that measures introduced to control the virus are having a serious impact on the lives of people experiencing domestic abuse and making accessing services more difficult. Surrey's outreach services, provided by the [Surrey Domestic Abuse Partnership \(SDAP\)](#), continue to operate during this crisis and the need for them reflects the national picture with an increase in contacts to the helpline. Supporting young people in emergency situations became even more important during lockdown and the speed at which we opened a new emergency placement centre was impressive; over the last 6 months this provided a safe and secure place for young people unable to return home.

The new [Corporate Parenting Strategy](#), setting out our vision and aspirations, has been published this year, following agreement in Full Council. I invite colleagues to take a look at it every now and then to remind ourselves of our promise to looked after children and care leavers in Surrey and the values and vision we as a Council have committed to. Many of the projects I will mention today will be key to meeting these commitments.

Providing comfortable and safe homes for our children is a priority of all parents, no less of SCC as corporate parents, and various projects have continued apace linked to this aspect of our Strategy. Providing more, and more stable, homes with foster families is what our Mockingbird Family Model is all about. The third Mockingbird Hub was launched as planned 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.

Further work to provide good homes for children in care has been made possible by the £5.5m capital development programme agreed at the July Cabinet for the Surrey CC children's residential home estate. This will enable us to develop two new community children's homes (with a third coming to Cabinet in 2021) and to rebuild the Shaw Contact Centre, in which children in care will be able to meet and keep in touch with their family and friends in a suitable environment.

With the support of the Members' Reference Group which is reporting at this meeting, our Corporate Parenting teams are developing a local 'No Wrong Door' service, a well-evaluated short term residential model that was first developed in North Yorkshire in 2015 and offers an integrated approach to supporting some of the most vulnerable teenagers who are either in care, or at risk of coming into care. The service will be up and running by April 2021 and will initially operate from two of our current children's homes before two purpose-built hubs are completed in 2022 under the capital development programme.

I am pleased to report that Children's Services has been selected for one of two digital innovation projects in Surrey County Council and we are working with an excellent provider to develop a product to enable residents to identify their children's needs early and to have them met quickly through an entirely self-service process. The aim is to develop a single

website bringing together all the information and advice in Surrey into one place. It is aimed at anyone seeking support for a child or family – the child, a professional, a volunteer, a parent. The most important thing is that parents and children will be intrinsically involved in the design. It's exciting and it could really empower Surrey families to get the help they need as soon as the problem is noticed, be it SEND, CAMHS, 0-19 health, Children's Social Care, Early or Targeted support. That's what our practice model, Family Resilience, is all about and this digital solution has the potential to move things forward.

Further join up between services has been achieved through the development of a Learners' Single Point of Access (L-SPA) which will gradually integrate over the next year with the Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA), which launched successfully in 2019 and has been praised by our regulators. The C-SPA moved to a newly prepared office space in Quadrant Court Woking this summer, ready to accommodate L-SPA colleagues.

Another critical area of transformation for us this year is the development of the new Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service that we have been working to transform for some time. In May the Committees in Common agreed a new service model and specifications and to go to open tender; one bid was received from an Alliance of local and national partners, encompassing statutory and third sector providers. There are many positives in the proposed service model, but also some issues requiring further work and we hope to conclude discussions with the Alliance by December. The new contract will take effect from April 2021 with a strong focus on transformation in the first year and it will be great to see the culmination of years of hard work to get these services right for children, young people and their families.

This week is National Care Leavers' week and I know many of my colleagues are taking part in the 'Reality Cheque' challenge. Our Members and staff are being challenged to live on the average weekly budget that some young people who have recently left care have to spend on food, drink, fun and non-essential travel. Our Care Leavers Service Personal Advisors are skilled at offering financial and practical assistance for our Care Leavers in setting up their home, entering employment, education or training and being prepared for adult life. However, this can be difficult for some young people who may also have to navigate the benefits system. I would like to offer my thanks to colleagues for taking part in this challenge and also to Members of the Corporate Parenting Board who have continued to keep in touch with children and young people throughout the lockdown, albeit mostly through Zoom, Teams and the good old fashioned postal service.

We are fortunate that, with agreement from the Department for Education (DfE), Essex County Council has been appointed as a Partner in Practice (PiP) for Surrey's children's services. Essex CC is rated as 'Outstanding' for Children's Services and specialises in working alongside other authorities to improve social work practice, and outcomes for children and their families. In September they carried out a full stocktake of our services and their initial feedback shows how far we've come since 2018. We welcome their support on our journey to delivering Good and Outstanding services for our residents.

In June, our [Universal Youth Work consultation](#) concluded after running for over 6 months and as a result we have agreed that:

We enable the community, voluntary and faith sector (CVFS) to use the youth centres for the benefit of young people at little or no cost. We act as an enabler and facilitator of open access universal youth work rather than providing the service directly. The SCC expertise that is valued by residents - and in particular young people - can then be remodelled to continue to support specific vulnerable groups.

Our priority is to make sure the centres are first and foremost benefiting young people in the community but there will also be opportunities in some centres for wider community use as the plans for each of the centres are progressed. It is a difficult time to be offering youth activities at the moment as children and young people over the age of 11 are required to wear face coverings, as are youth workers and the groups are limited in size. While this is slowing things down, it will not dampen the enthusiasm of our voluntary sector partners in the medium term.

Our staff have worked tirelessly throughout the lockdown and subsequent restrictions to ensure children and families in Surrey have continued to receive vital support; we know that personal contact with young people and their families is crucial to our service users, and they rely on us now more than ever. I would like to personally thank our frontline staff and all those supporting our services behind-the-scenes for their relentless focus on putting children and families first through such a difficult time.

This page is intentionally left blank