

Health and Wellbeing board

11 April 2024

Corporate Parenting Update

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Summary

This report provides an update to the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) on the work of the Corporate Parenting Board during the period April 2023 – February 2024. The HWBB have a key role in supporting the delivery of Corporate Parenting functions.

Corporate parenting is “a collective responsibility, with all officers and members of the local authority to act as effective and caring corporate parents for looked-after children, with key roles in improving their educational attainment, providing stable and high-quality placements and proper planning for when they leave care” (DfE 2013, Director and Lead Member for Children’s Services – Roles and Responsibilities)

Medway’s Childrens Services vision highlights the need to work together, keeping children and families at the heart of what we do. This will collectively enable us to ensure children in care and care leavers in Medway are afforded opportunities to achieve their potential.

1. Recommendation

1.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to note the report, the steps taken to deliver on our corporate parenting responsibilities and support the priorities for the coming year.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1 This report supports the Council Strategy priority “Supporting Medway’s people to realise their potential” to achieve the outcome ‘Resilient Families’.

- 2.2 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 placed a duty on local authorities to have regards to seven principles when exercising a function to children in care and care leavers.

The principles are:

1. To act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
4. To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

- 2.3 The Health and Wellbeing Board should also note the functions for Health Section 10(5) of the 2004 Act, which places a duty on relevant partners to co-operate with the local authority in the making of these arrangements, therefore promoting and ensuring a joined-up approach.

3. Background

- 3.1 Medway Children's Service is ambitious for our children, young people and families. Through motivating, supporting, encouraging and developing our staff to empower children, families and colleagues we seek to deliver high-quality services, in collaboration with families and partners their voice will matter. We want every child to have a healthy, happy and safe start to life in Medway. In delivering corporate parenting functions, we will act as any good parent, to support, encourage and guide children in our care and care leavers. Working in partnership, we will seek to ensure that children in care and care leavers are not disadvantaged as a result of their care status.

3.2 The Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) meets quarterly, with six sub-groups now reporting into the Board. Local Elections in May 2023 resulted in a change of administration, from Conservative to the Labour and Co-operative Group. Councillor Adam Price is the new Lead Member and has taken over as chair of CPB from July 2023. Membership crosses all key areas, including representatives from the Council's children in care council (Medway Children

and Young People's Council (MCYPC), Council officers including Virtual School, elected members, strategic leads for key partner agencies, as well as representative foster carers and adoptive parents.

3.3 The six sub-groups of the Board are:

- Feeling Safe and Cared For
- Listening to You (participation and engagement)
- Housing
- Health
- School, College and Work
- Corporate Parenting Delivery Group

3.4 Representatives from Medway Children and Young People's Council (MCYPC) attend each meeting and share their news and issues, as well as being supported to offer challenge and contribution to the workplan. Children and young people are also supported to share their views through the Young Lives Foundation (YLF), who provides advocacy services, as well as supporting the delivery of MCYPC.

3.5 The Corporate Parenting Board has been re-designed to provide the necessary leadership that drives an ambitious and multi-agency approach to achieving its objectives. The Board has regular agenda items that support it to oversee satisfactory completion of actions and work in a way that ensures the voice of children and young people are influential in decision making. This progress was recognised in Childrens Services Ofsted Inspection in June 2023, which found services for children in care and care leavers to be Good.

3.6 Corporate Parenting Champion roles have been developed for elected members covering areas such as health, education, and experiences of our care leavers. This plays to members' strengths and areas of expertise, brings greater scope for effective challenge, and encourages an increased focus on the issues which are critical to children and young people. The Board ensures there is feedback to our children and young people after each Board meeting.

3.7 The CPB receives a summary of performance data at each meeting in addition to the performance reports of each sub-group.

3.8 **Sufficiency of placements**

Over the last year, Children's Services have continued to work with commissioning colleagues to review and understand the needs and gaps in placement provision and to consider further options to improve sufficiency. Developments during the year include opening an E-Bed provision in partnership with an IFA for children who need accommodating in an emergency, successful re-tendering for an enhanced floating support offer and work to re-open Eden House as a residential facility for our children in accordance with our vision to keep children close to their families and within Medway boundaries resource, planned to open in the next three months. Further developments have included working with the market to commission and establish contractual relationships with IFAs and residential providers, and establish a dynamic purchasing scheme which has increased the number of suppliers we work with.

- 3.9 Despite an improved payment structure for foster carers and a strong commitment to training and support, it remains a challenge to recruit and expand our in-house service. Over the last year there has been a net loss of one fostering household. Recruitment and retention of foster carers is currently very challenging nationally and Medway's picture mirrors the national situation, with the national cost of living crisis eroding the improvement in fees.
- 3.10 The significant shortfall of foster care and residential provision seen nationally over the last few years has led to increasing challenges locating suitable registered providers for children and young people in registered provision. This means that on occasions, Children's Services is unable to locate a registered provision for some children and has no alternative to use unregistered provision for young people under 16 years. In Medway, we currently have 4 young people living in such arrangements. These young people are subject to extensive support, weekly visiting by social workers, additional oversight by managers and weekly reviews of the placement provision to ensure safe care.
- 3.11 Medway's move to the RAA, as part of the Adoption Partnership Southeast (APSE) in 2020, has continued to deliver significant improvements for children. More children now benefit from permanence through adoption (16 in the last year). Strengthened panel processes means children are matched in a timelier way with prospective adopters.

4. Options

- 4.1 This report provides an update on the work of Corporate Parenting Board over the last year and does not require any decision from the Board.

5. Advice and analysis

- 5.1 The ILACS inspection of July 2023 evidenced considerable progress, specifically in the quality and impact of the corporate parenting board. The report noted that 'the voice of children is heard loud and clear by all members of the corporate parenting board through the attendance of representatives from the Medway Children in Care Council. There is a real presence and understanding of the child's voice in all corporate meetings and decision-making forums.'
- 5.2 Performance data is produced and reviewed at each meeting, reporting on key performance indicators.
- 5.2 Numbers of children in care in 2023-24 increased from 467 at the start of the financial year to 503 in August but have now reduced again to 481. This is still higher than at the start of the year but does include Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children who are now allocated to Medway as part of the National Transfer Scheme which Medway joined in April 2023. There are currently 23 Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking children aged between 14 and 17 years in our care, compared with 2 at the end of January 2023. Rates of children in care per 10,000 are slightly higher than national comparative data at 75 per 10,000. Placement stability for our children in care has continued to be on a

par with national and south east region, although there is a small cohort of children with complex needs who have experienced multiple placement changes.

- 5.3 There has been a reduction in the percentage of children in matched long-term fostering compared with a year ago – now 48%, but this is higher than 39% in 2021/2022. This has been achieved in the context of wider market challenges regarding a shortfall in sufficient homes for children in care.
- 5.4 16 children were adopted during the year 2022-23, a slight reduction over 19 last year largely due to delays in final hearings through the courts.
- 5.5 Numbers of care leavers have decreased slightly during the year, from 184 in March 2023 to 178 currently.
- 5.6 There is further work to do in respect of ensuring timely health assessments for children when they first enter care. Performance is currently below target of 80% carried out within 20 working days and stands at 55% in the last monthly report. Review health assessment performance is much stronger with current performance showing as 91% of children having an updated health assessment. To improve performance, regular monitoring and tracking activity is taking place within the service, alongside bi monthly meetings with health colleagues. Timely success to health assessments for those children placed outside of Medway continues to present a challenge, and this is raised at a national level with NHS England.
- 5.7 Performance for dental checks currently shows that 73% of children in care have an updated dental check within the last twelve months. The service monitors dental checks through regular performance clinics. Additional dental sessions are available to children in care as well as support for any child or young person who is struggling with access.
- 5.8 Kent and Medway services specialist mental health service is a specialist and targeted service providing emotional wellbeing and mental health advice, support, assessment and treatment for young people and their families across Medway, provided by the North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT). The organisation also provides a Single Point of Access (SPA) for mental health and emotional wellbeing services. Children in care referred for a non-urgent mental health assessment have a KPI to ensure they are seen within 10 working days and within 5 days for urgent mental health assessments.
- 5.9 The Leaving Care service have worked with Medway Community Healthcare to develop a specific 'care leavers pathway' which allows for the allocated nurse to continue to support the young person's health needs until they are 19 years old. The team now attend the Children and Families Hub at the Elaine centre once a week and has a private room for any health discussions to take place at the Elaine Centre.
- 5.10 Children and young people who were in the care of Medway Local Authority for the academic year 2022-2023. did not perform as well as their peers during the academic year 2022-2023. The Medway Virtual School works with schools in order to identify and enable schools to implement appropriate

strategies of intervention and support at a pupil level. This is not yet showing in the outcomes. Discussions at each PEP (personal education plan) meeting consider progress in maths and English (reading and writing). Interventions are identified and implemented. Securing the expected level in reading, writing and maths is a priority and training has been delivered in developing SMART targets.

There is a higher percentage of children in care to Medway that have SEN (SEN support and EHCP) compared to national. In 2023, children in care to Medway with SEN matched the performance of children in care nationally in maths, reading and writing.

Medway has recently had its partnership inspection of service for children with SEND. The report is embargoed until March 22nd but the progress made in relation to social care provision for children was recognised. There is further work to do to ensure effective input into EHCP plans for children in care.

5.11 Priorities for next year

The Board will continue to use the themed work plan to focus on key issues which are important to children and young people's lives. New Board members including the Lead Member, will have the opportunity of briefings and training to support them in their new roles. The Board's priority going forward, will be to continue to ensure that it is effective in translating the issues raised by children and young people into actions that make a tangible difference, with a focus on the following aims and objectives:

- To make care experience a protected characteristic in Medway.
- To make sure that the whole council and relevant partner agencies commit to excellent standards of corporate parenting.
- To set high expectations and improved long-term outcomes for children in care and care leavers – for their happiness; well-being; educational success; and future prospects.
- To make sure that the voice of the child and young person in care influences both policy and the services that they receive, and that young people are engaged with any action intended to develop and improve services or to recruit key staff members.
- To oversee and monitor the key performance indicators for the health, well-being and education of children in care and care leavers.
- To consider the outcomes of regulatory visits and inspection reports on provision for children in care.
- To ensure that relevant key plans, strategies and associated resources identify and make explicit the contribution that they make to targets agreed for improvement.
- To celebrate the achievements of children in care and their carers.
- To develop an informed view of Council provision and services through a programme of well-planned visits and feedback from Board members.

6. Risk Management

- 6.1 The service is currently facing ongoing challenges to maintaining a sustained focus on service improvement in relation to corporate parenting, which includes:

- unfilled posts and the challenges in sourcing agency social workers to cover vacancies leading to high caseloads.
- sufficiency of placements for children in our care.

6.2 The key risks are as follows:

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Operational risks	Insufficient Workforce (Social Workers) to deliver statutory and non-statutory responsibilities.	Additional recruitment resource. Effective workforce planning.	BII
	Risk that improvement is not sustained	Service planning with regular oversight from management team. Work of Continuous Improvement Board	CII
	Challenge of finding the right homes for children in our care	Work with commissioning to manage the market. Support our foster carers to meet the more complex needs of our children	BII

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

7. Consultation

7.1 This update has been produced in consultation with the children's social care workforce and colleagues in Commissioning and Performance Management

8. Climate change implications

8.1 There are no implications as a direct result of the recommendations of this report.

9. Financial implications

9.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this update report. Strategies are in place to monitor the spend on placements and savings have

been achieved this year through improved scrutiny and challenge of placement decisions and costs. The service aims to draw on its improved reputation associated with a 'Good' rating from the latest Ofsted inspection which will have a beneficial impact on moving to a sustainable budget for the service.

10. Legal implications

10.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

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Appendices

None

Background papers

None.