

Corporate Parenting Strategic Board – The Impact of New Arrangements

Report of the Director of Children's and Young People's Futures

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

1 Recommendation

1.1 That the Committee continue to endorse the refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategic Board Structure, following its move to a Champion Model endorsed in January 2024 due to the positive impact this is now starting to have on Children in Care and Care Leavers.

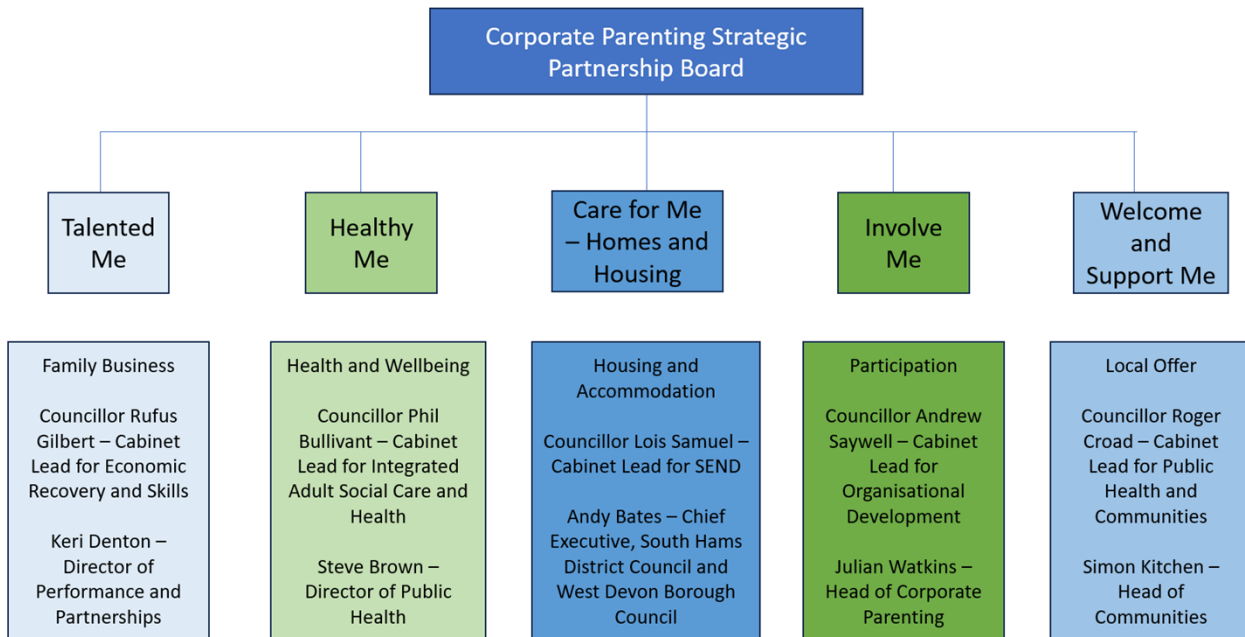
2 Background / Introduction

2.1 This is an update on the Impact of the changes to the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board (CPSB) which were initiated in September 2023, and finalised in January 2024, on the lives of Children and Young People in our care, or who have left our care.

2.2 Devon County Council ratified changes to its governance and delivery of its Corporate Parenting Strategic Board (CPBS) in January 2024. This followed advice provided by the DFE Advisor for Care Experienced People, Mark Riddell, who had visited Devon County Council (DCC) in July 2023 and had recommended introduction of a Champion Model to its CPSB with subgroups leading on focused areas of development which would report to an overarching governance board.

2.3 The new CPSB arrangements was endorsed by the Children's Scrutiny Committee on 25th March 2024.

2.4 The CPSB and its subgroups are as follows:



2.5 Scrutiny Members will note that each of the Subgroups is chaired by a Member, and co-led by a senior officer to enable both political leadership and organisational decision-making to combine to drive improvement activity.

2.6 Devon County Council currently cares for 849 children. This is a significant reduction from the previous attendance at Scrutiny Committee to discuss the changes to CPSB in March 2024 when there were 895 children in our care. (5% reduction). The reason for this reduction is in part due to the numbers of children who now find early permanency through adoption, or who end care proceedings to a permanent kinship arrangement i.e. SGO, but also due to our strengthening practice framework, Restorative Practice. At its heart, restorative practice aims to build on relational practice to create positive change. This has reduced the number of families with whom Devon County Council are in Care Proceedings with from 160 families in January 2024 (263 children) to 122 families (215 children) in December 2024. This reduction in the numbers of children who are cared for is positive, as it means that more children can remain with their families and within their community through successful relationship-based interventions.

2.7 There are currently 554 Former Relevant Care Leavers open to the Devon County Council Care Experienced People Service. This includes 385 young people who are age 18-21 for who we have a clear statutory duty to provide a service to. There are a further 165 young people receiving a service who are over the age of 21. These are young people who are choosing to receive a service from us and often have more complex needs and require our extended support and guidance. We have an extended duty to offer support and guidance to 21–25-year-olds. There are also 4 young people who we are supporting who are 25 years of age but require some additional input from us at this stage in their lives.

2.8 Across the children in care and care leaver cohorts we are supporting 111 Young Asylum Seekers. 62 are Children in Care, with 49 care leavers. A dedicated team with social workers and personal advisors focuses on the needs of our young asylum-seeking children. Of note, Young Asylum Seekers are an older cohort of the children in care population and therefore leave care and require supported accommodation sooner after entry into care than the general population of children in care.

2.9 Feedback from children in care and care experienced young people is that they can feel the difference that has been made through the work of corporate parenting and leaders are acting on their feedback. They have informed Ofsted of this and Mark Riddell, National Advisor for Care Experienced Young People.

3 Main Body / Proposal

3.1 In this part of the report, I will explain the specific work undertaken by each subgroup in turn and then comment on the impact on children.

Talented Me

3.2 In the last 12 months, Talented Me has had a clear focus on developing opportunities to support Education Employment and Training activity for our young people. There have been several key areas of work to include developing a data base of offers for young people that can store offers of work experience or employment offers and then help to match young people to these offers. Offers are being added to this through the subgroup's links to our procurement teams who expect businesses who partner with DCC to make an offer for care leavers. Further work to develop the data base is underway including a refresh to support improved matching of offers of employment with aspirations of our young people.

3.3 Performance information indicates from 1st January 2025, there are 43% care experienced who are in Education, Employment and Training. This is an improved position from 2023 when it was at 33%. There will be continued relentless focus in this area alongside the work of Virtual School to ensure our children and young people are able to access fully opportunities to achieve their career aspirations and to achieve the target of 63% by 2026.

3.4 Talented me has developed the Positive About Care Experience Programme (PACE) in conjunction with Exeter College. This programme supports potential employers to engage in training around what it is like to have care experienced young people working for them and what our young people may need additionally to support them. We already have circa 40 employers who have benefited from the PACE Programme and 7 young people.

3.5 Talented Me has reviewed the apprenticeship offer for CEP with DCC. We currently have 9 apprenticeships that are ringfenced for care experienced people and have ambition for 12 within the year raising to 20 in 2026. Of note our care experienced apprentices have fed back that they are well supported and engaged both to Mark Riddell and Ofsted.

3.6 The subgroup has worked to understand the barriers for young people accessing education, employment and training. A dedicated workshop took place on 14th January 2025 which provided the opportunity for care leavers to share their experiences and views. Some of the barriers included access to affordable housing, access to mental health support, support to prepare earlier on for employment, financial disadvantage, availability and cost of travel and accommodation stability. The solutions to these barriers are being developed as part of the talented me action plan.

Next steps

3.7 Talented me will continue to focus their work on improving outcomes for children and young people in terms of the continuing to increase the number in education, employment and training. The subgroup action plan includes work on engagement needed with local businesses to join the Care Leaver Covenant which will further open opportunities to our young people locally and nationally through employers linking to the Covenant who offer work experience, jobs, and apprenticeships, as well as various discounts for young people.

3.8 Talented Me are also looking at aspects of NEET Prevention. This group were instrumental in the development of the Aspirations Worker role within the virtual school which works directly with those young people who are at risk of becoming NEET. This role has already had an impact on the reduction of those without a year 12 destination from 16% to 10% this year.

3.9 There are further plans for virtual school which will include strengthening the leadership in line with the redesign of inclusion and learning service. The redesign of the service will ensure that the virtual school is able to meet the scope of the changes outlined in the Children's Wellbeing and School's Bill December 2024. This strengthened leadership will be fundamental for improving the outcomes for children and young people across Devon.

3.10 Key priorities for next 12 months aligned to the Children Services Improvement plan and Ofsted ILACS feedback:

- A) Continue to work with education colleagues to improve our response to children missing full time education in school.
- B) Children not in employment, education or training (NEET) need to be supported by the partnership to ensure a reduction in children and young people who are not accessing an appropriate level of education. The Virtual School have developed strong relationships, however educational outcomes still need to improve.
- C) Joint working across all partners needs to be strengthened to provide an effective multi-agency response.

Healthy Me

3.11. The Healthy Me subgroup had clear priorities around developing smoother pathways between children's health services and adult services, particularly when considering the pathways and support services for emotional and mental health needs of young people.

3.12 There is ongoing work regarding the transitional arrangements, with leaders in both health and social care coming together to ensure that this is more effective. There has been increased work to improve access to CAMHS for children in our care, which has led to a CAMHS worker being embedded in the service one morning a week for consultation activities. This is having a good take up across the service which is starting to improve planning for children through ensuring that their emotional needs can be considered more quickly within their care planning.

3.13 Healthy Me has improved access to therapeutic offers for care experienced people. This has been through the rollout of the Ask Jan App subscriptions which have been offered to 90 care leavers to date. Ask Jan is an App that was developed with the Rees Foundation for care leavers, and which includes 24-hour access to immediate counselling services, as well as other advice/guidance and discounts for care leavers. We have more subscriptions available for young people when they need them and the plan to increase further uptake is being progressed as part of the action plan for Healthy Me.

3.14 The subgroup has also developed the role of the therapeutic wellbeing officers, 3 of whom are now embedded in the care leaver service. These workers offer consultation to Personal Advisors about the therapeutic needs of their young people, as well as some direct contact time with care leavers. This is having a positive impact on young people, as it means that the service now receives rapid advice on how best to support those young people who require a therapeutic response along with bridging the relationship between CAMHS and Devon Partnership Trust. Personal Advisors, and most importantly the young people are recognising the positive impact that these new roles have brought.

3.15 The subgroup has progressed actions so that children in care can have access to free dental health care in South and North Devon and are looking to expand this offer across all areas. There is also the work with our care experienced young people who are supported to access their health records through the use of NHS app along with access to free prescriptions going live in April 2025.

3.16 The subgroup has a Task and Finish Group which reports into the subgroup on a bi-monthly basis and meets every fortnight. The Task and Finish Group has been successful in joining up health and social care systems to accurately report on the completion of both Initial Health Assessments (IHA) and Review Health Assessments (RHA) as well as the delivery of training in respect of Health Assessments to all Independent Reviewing Officers and more recently, beginning to train all social care practitioners in the children in care service. In addition, the Task and Finish Group has overseen dip-sampling work reviewing social care responses to IHAs, RHAs, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires, Immunisations, Dental and Optical checks. The findings from this dip sampling will be available for the Task and Finish group on the 27.02.25 in order for the partners in attendance to develop key actions resulting from the recommendations made in the report, improving health services and responses for all of our children in care.

Next steps

3.17. The subgroup's focus for the next 12 months is through the Task and Finish Group to drive forward performance and joined up working between child in care health services and children's social care in ensuring robust and appropriate responses to children and young people's mental health needs as well as their overall physical health needs.

3.18. Key priorities for next 12 months aligned to the Children Services Improvement plan and Ofsted ILACS feedback:

- A) Develop a mental health pathway with partner agencies for 18-25 year olds.
- B) Health histories must be provided to all children in care by the age of 18, so that young people can be aware of all important aspects in relation to their own health.
- C) Joint working across all partners needs to be strengthened to provide an effective multi-agency response.

Care for Me

3.19. The Care for Me Subgroup had a clear remit to review the challenges in relation to housing for care leavers which has been a long-term challenge for Devon County Council and its district partners. Scrutiny Members will be aware that Ofsted raised significant concerns about housing for care leavers in the 2020 inspection. There has been an extremely long journey for the County and the Districts to be able to agree on a joint housing protocol for care leavers. This was finalised through the work of the Care for Me Subgroup and we now have agreements in place that districts will essentially retain ownership for care leavers housing support needs and work cohesively with the County to avoid decisions that lead to care leavers facing immediate homelessness. Whilst there is still a lot of work to do, there is change and any decision to find a care leaver intentionally homeless must be made jointly with a senior housing lead and senior DCC officer. Even when this occurs there is an understanding that the district will still support the care leaver (in most circumstances) to have some form of accommodation.

3.20 The Care for Me Subgroup has also reviewed housing panels and has developed new mechanisms which aim to avoid or support young people who are homeless or in unsuitable accommodation to be housed as soon as is practicable. This has led to an enhanced DCC presence within the Homelessness Prevention Panel, which ensures decisions can be made immediately to support providers where there is a risk of breakdown in supported accommodation and has also led to the formation of a Creative Solutions Panel (CSP).

3.21 CSP is a forum where planning for the care leavers who have the most complex lives can be undertaken with access to senior officers from children's social care, adult social care, and health, as well as relevant district housing leads. Chaired at Deputy Director level, this panel will consider care leavers who are either at risk of becoming

street homeless, or who are in bed and breakfast accommodation, and will drive a partnership solution to their needs. This has had a significant impact on reducing the number of care leavers in Bed and Breakfast accommodation in Devon, with a sustained reduction in this from the summer period (July 24) when there were 22 young people in Bed and Breakfast accommodation, to now (February 2025) just 2 young people over the age of 21. The group are now working to consider how to develop more sustainable housing options for this cohort across Devon. This has had a major impact on young people who are at risk of homelessness, with them accessing more suitable accommodation where services can be wrapped around them, for example floating support workers, substance misuse workers, and the therapeutic wellbeing workers. Of note, the group also developed a Team Around the Person Model for the most complex young people. This is a model where an Independent Reviewing Officer will pull together the team around the young person and independently chair the meeting that develops a clear multi-agency plan which is then reviewed in the same way.

3.22. There are currently (January 25) 37 Care Leavers who are viewed to be living in unsuitable accommodation in Devon. This includes those where they are choosing to live with family members/partners or friends where the Personal Advisor has judged this to be unsuitable (this is 13 young people), there are 13 young people currently in Custody, and 6 where their current accommodation is not suitable and therefore, they are viewed as no fixed abode and or sofa surfing. This compares to 90 care leavers being viewed as living in unsuitable accommodation in July 2024.

3.23. Importantly, another highly significant and successful impact this group has had is the changes that have been made to the Devon Home Choice Policy in favouring Devon Care Leavers. At the point that a Care Leaver is awarded Band B on Devon Home Choice (the second highest priority bidding for social housing), this is backdated to their 16th Birthday giving them credit in terms of time on waiting lists when they bid for housing. This has had a positive impact on all care leavers who are bidding for social housing.

3.24. Another key impact of this group has been the work completed on Council Tax Exemption which all Devon Care Leavers now benefit from. Again, this group has led a pan-devon district response to this issue, and this has provided a positive impact financially for all care leavers.

3.25. Care for Me also has some nominal oversight on placement sufficiency for children who are still in our care, however the groups key focus has been and remains care leaver housing. The A Place Called Home Strategic Board, chaired by the Deputy Director, leads on this work, with key work strands around children's home, fostering sufficiency and reducing the number of children who require a family-based home but are currently within residential children's homes.

Next Steps

3.26 The next steps for Care for Me will be to embed a zero tolerance of the use of bed and breakfast for care leavers in Devon, develop a sufficiency strategy for Care Leavers with complex lives, and to develop and strengthen specific pathways for some young people to include those with Care Act eligibilities.

3.27 Key priorities for next 12 months aligned to the Children Services Improvement plan and Ofsted ILACS feedback:

- A) Embed the protocol that all 16/17 children in care will have a care versus support assessment before moving to supported accommodation. Ensure there is Quality Assurance Activity undertaken regarding the quality of care vs support assessments and ensure that the Care for Me Sub-group has oversight of the recommendations from this activity.
- B) Strengthen our planning for children in care to ensure permanence and placement stability.
- C) Strengthen practice in relation to Care Experienced Young People in Custody to ensure good pathway and discharge planning.
- D) Investigate the potential for joint commissioning of high needs placements for children with relevant system partners, developing costed business cases where required, to support increased placement options for young people.
- E) Review and implement a new procedure around unregistered placements to continue to reduce overall numbers of children in unregistered arrangements. Where there are complex needs, the partnership response needs to be strengthened.
- F) Continue to monitor the implementation of the sufficiency strategy through the Place called Home Board.
- G) Continue to work with districts to embed a zero tolerance approach to the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for care experienced people. District Councils are to increase provision and provide better support – there are too many care leavers in unsuitable accommodation for too long. Some feel unsafe which means they subsequently can't maintain relationships or progress their education / employment.
- H) Joint working across all partners needs to be strengthened to provide an effective multi-agency response.

Involve Me

3.28. The involve Me subgroup had a clear lead on the redevelopment of the Devon Local Offer to Care Leavers. With the contribution of the workstreams of the other subgroups, there has been significant work undertaken to listen to the voice of our young people and build a strong and comprehensive leaving care offer for our young people. This has reviewed the (sometimes longstanding) requests of our young people and has driven priority setting within subgroups and has also reviewed other needs of our young

people. A link to the local offer is here [Devon's Local Offer to Care Leavers - Children In Care and Care Leavers - Children In Care and Care Leavers.](#)

3.29. Some key highlights which have had a direct impact on our young people are: an increased setting up home grant from £2000 to £3000, stronger offers of support for those at university, initial support with big ticket items when having a baby, the council tax exemption, free leisure centre use, and the free prescriptions from April 2025 which will soon be added. Involve Me has worked with Care Experienced People to develop what they need to be in the Local Offer making it comprehensive and modernising it so that it is fit for purpose. This is having a positive impact on all care leavers in Devon as they are all able to access relevant parts of it, and it has been widely distributed with a mailshot to our young people.

3.30 Involve Me has also worked with our young people to develop a new assessment tool for those children who are still in our care, developing a tool that has a greater fitness for purpose for those in care, rather than a generic tool for all children. The roll out of this assessment tool was delayed in the run up to the recent full ILACS inspection but has been recently piloted. We are now using the feedback from the pilot to make some alterations as to how the tool is used to then roll this out.

3.31 Involve Me led on the development of a drop-in centre in Exeter for Care Leavers and Young Asylum Seekers. This was thought of while partnering with colleagues within Young Devon. We are now sharing their office space 3 days a week to run a duty system for care leavers living in the city.

3.32 The group has also worked with our care experienced apprentice in customer relations to develop a bespoke complaints guidance for children. This is now available on the Devon County Council website and has the impact of demystifying the complaints process for our children and young people. This can be viewed here: [Complaints Process for Children and Young People.](#)

3.33 Finally, this group have been instrumental in developing a Young Corporate Parenting Role, which has led to a stronger youth voice in key meetings and some relevant policies, which has meant that young people have benefited more widely from issues raised and associated change. An example was the review of the Devon Home Choice policy.

Next Steps

3.34 The next steps for Involve Me include developing a Corporate Parenting Practice and Activity Week to look at learning from audit activity, Ofsted Findings, and what young people tell us about our care. This aims to culminate with the celebration of our children at their awards ceremony in the summer. Involve Me are also keen to find ways to develop positive communications about children in our care and our care leavers to raise awareness of them in a very positive light to support future fostering campaigns and improve ETE opportunities for them.

The subgroup will further oversee Member visits to our children's homes and staying close provision. The feedback from these visits will support the work of this and other subgroups and will be key in supporting the future developments of homes as planned.

3.35 Key priorities for next 12 months aligned to the Children Services Improvement plan and Ofsted ILACS feedback:

- A) Continue to embed our practice framework to ensure all of our practitioners and leaders work restoratively with our children, families and each other.
- B) Ensure family network meetings are consistently used to identify potential carers from within the extended family at the earliest opportunity and continue to review as circumstances change.
- C) Increase partnership in person attendance at Child Protection Conferences and Children in Care Reviews.
- D) Launch the new Participation Strategy to ensure we engage with children and young people to help shape our services and improve practice.
- E) The time it takes for young people to access their records must be reduced to ensure they have the ability to know more about their wider history.
- F) Joint working across all partners needs to be strengthened to provide an effective multi-agency response.

Welcome and Support Me

3.36 Welcome and Support Me have been instrumental in developing the Devon welcome to our Young Asylum Seekers (YAS). This group have created a welcome pack to support YAS when they arrive in Devon and have been involved in the creation of a series of videos in different languages to explain to young people the importance of Initial Health Assessment and the process for this. This was created alongside some of our young asylum seekers. The purpose of this video was to allay the fears that many of our YAS feel when engaging with authorities initially. It has been impactful in supporting new YAS with this process, which can feel daunting. The videos won first place in the Coram Voice digital awards. Coram Voice is a national organisation which supports the participation of care experienced people in developing practice within Corporate Parenting at a local and national level. For anyone interested in reading more about this project the link is [Amplify 2024 Digital Award Winners: Devon Stand Up Speak Up Young Asylum Seekers - Coram Voice.](#)

3.37 The other key area of work that Welcome and Support Me have developed has been in creating a budget from the central household support fund to support care leavers in Devon with the cost-of-living crisis. This has included support to buy high ticket items such as washing machines, but also with support for payment of rent for care leavers where they have ended up with some debt, and importantly to support young people with tools for trade and transportation costs for ETE activity. We are also using this budget creatively to support the needs of some of our most vulnerable young people, for example to support a young person who was fleeing violence.

3.38 Welcome and Support Me has also been reviewing how we, as corporate parents, confidently support young people to talk about their life story. The group have been reviewing best practice in this area and have made some proposals to the Children's Senior Management Team meeting about next steps. This will lead to training for social workers and carers and will have a strong impact on supporting children to better understand their history. Whilst this has not yet had an impact directly on practice the plan is that the work proposed will support all children and young people in care positively in the future.

3.39 Finally, Welcome and Support me are developing storage facilities for the belongings of children in care and care leavers so that their heritage is kept safe for them until they can use their belongings and store them in their own homes. This is something that young people and staff have raised as a key issue as some have lost items, or some things have been damaged. This is a direct response to youth voice. We are starting to develop this in the North of the county where it will start to have positive impact, and we will roll this out Devon wide.

Next Steps

3.40 The next steps for Welcome and Support me are to further develop Life Story work, agree a way forward for the storage workstream and the group has just started to develop a working group around exploitation of young people with care experience. This will involve partner agencies to develop input into the overall exploitation strategy for Children and Young People.

3.41 Key priorities for next 12 months aligned to the Children Services Improvement plan and Ofsted ILACS feedback:

- A) Ensure we deliver regular focused quality assurance activity with regards to monitoring all assessment quality and timeliness as well as the quality of plans for our children in care and care experienced young people - multi-agency auditing activity lead through the Corporate Parenting Board of partnership inclusion within Assessments and joint ownership of recommended actions.
- B) Implement the new CIC reassessment template to ensure our children in care have a yearly updated needs assessment and permanence plan.
- C) Strengthen transfer systems across all services to ensure clear transitions for children and young people.
- D) Strengthen partnership knowledge of and responses to extra-familial harm.
- E) working across all partners need to be strengthened to provide an effective multi-agency response.

4 Options / Alternatives

4.1 The New Structure of the Board is continuing to embed and is having a positive impact in all subgroup areas for our young people. This is being recognised by the DFE advisor for Care Leavers, and importantly our young people.

4.2 Therefore, the recommendation is to continue to endorse the current CPSB structure.

5 Consultations / Representations / Technical Data

5.1 As noted, the DFE Advisor for Care Leavers has recognised Devon's improvement in the delivery of services for care leavers.

6 Strategic Plan

6.1 Corporate Parenting Strategic Board and the work of its subgroups aligns with the County Council's aim to be ambitious for children and young people and supporting communities to be safe, connected and resilient.

6.2 Specifically, the work being undertaken links to improved health and wellbeing offers for this cohort of children and young people, strengthening employment and education opportunity, and tackling homelessness and social isolation.

7 Financial Considerations

7.1 There are no additional financial considerations at this stage.

8 Legal Considerations

8.1 There are no specific legal considerations to raise.

9 Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)

9.1 The Corporate Parenting Strategic Board and its subgroups will have a neutral impact on the environment.

9.2 The work of the board aims to improve sustainable housing for children in care and care leavers and improved social mobility for them.

10 Equality Considerations

10.1 Devon County Council recognises care experience as a protected characteristic. The Corporate Parenting Strategic Board unashamedly advocates for positive discrimination for Devon children in care and care leavers.

11 Risk Management Considerations

11.1 No risks have been identified with the current structure of the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board. I would respectfully submit that to change the current structure would impact on the work of the Board and would reduce the pace of the improvements that are being made in this area, and that could cause reputational risk to Devon County Council.

12 Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations

12.1 Over the last year the changed format of the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board and its subgroups has started to have a positive impact on the lives of children in care and care leavers in Devon. This has been recognised by Mark Riddell the DFE National Advisor for Care Experienced Young People who has highlighted the improved Local Offer and leadership in this area. More importantly, our young people are also recognising positive change and that this is having a positive impact on their lives

12.2 There is more work to do to improve children and young people's outcomes in particular with education, employment and training, affordable housing and mental health pathways alongside the work required to improve care planning, the provision and sufficiency of suitable homes in Devon to increase stability in the lives of our children in our care and continue to strengthen partnership approach to Corporate Parenting.

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