

## Corporate Parenting Strategic Board – Impact of New Arrangements

### Report of the Head of Service of Corporate Parenting

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

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#### **1.0. Recommendation**

- 1.1. That the Committee be asked to endorse the continued use of the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board and Subgroup structure that uses a champion model, recognising the positive impact that this is already starting to have on the corporate parenting strategic direction and practice across Devon County Council, District Councils, and the wider corporate parenting partnership.

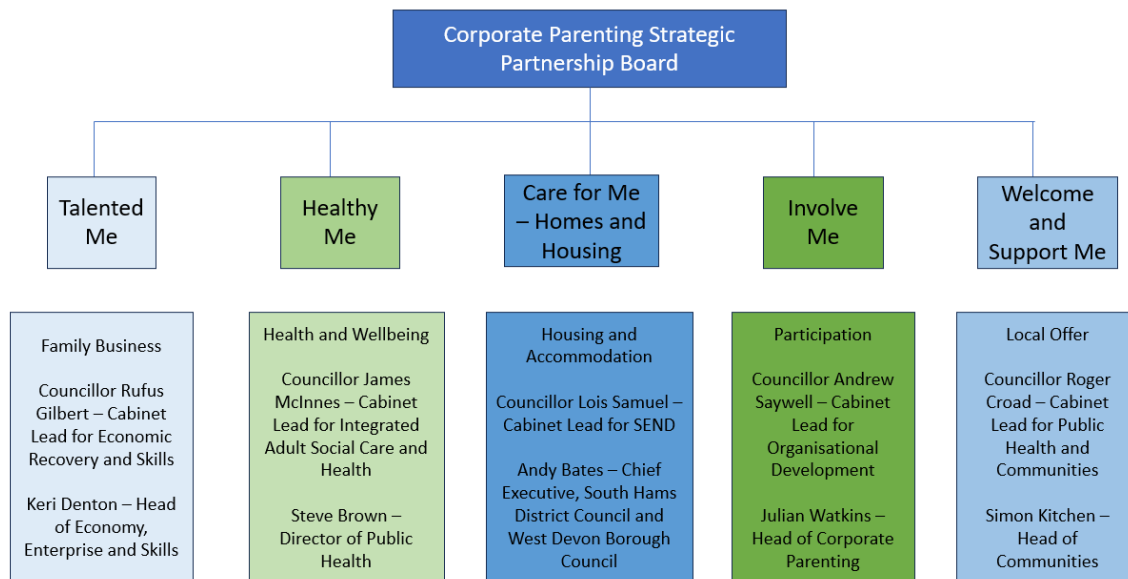
#### **2.0. Background / Introduction**

- 2.1. Devon has 895 children in care end of February 2024. In January 2023, there were 837 with it increasing to its highest level of 906 children and young people in October 2023.
- 2.2. Audit activity undertaken to understand this increase has identified an increase of 50 Young Asylum Seekers through the National Transfer Scheme, and an increase following improvement activity occurred across Children's Social Care which led to children and young people requiring legal intervention to safeguard and protect them as they no longer could remain safely in the care of their family.
- 2.3. Devon County Council has 539 Care Experienced People (care leavers) with whom the service is actively working, in comparison to January 2023 where this was 477 care leavers. The increase is due to Young Asylum Seekers who have been accommodated and have turned 18 in our care, but also the service encouraging young people with defined support from Care Leaving services beyond the age of 21. This is good practice and offers continued intervention, support and guidance for care leavers who are entering young adulthood.
- 2.4. There are 510 former relevant care leavers of the total 539 whereby they will remain open until at least the age of 21 years in line with our statutory duty due to their time in our care on or prior to the child's 16<sup>th</sup> Birthday. The care leaving service encourage as many of Devon's care leavers to remain with care leaving service past their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and until the age of 25 years. The Service also has a statutory duty to support care leavers should they choose to leave the service and then return.

- 2.5. Care Leaving Service are currently working with 103 care leavers over the age of 21 years, of which only 5 young people between 21-25 were closed to the service in the last 12 months.
- 2.6. Devon children social care currently has 109 children in care aged 16 years and 134 aged 17 years, who are allocated to social workers and Personal Advisor's. This means that we can expect up to 243 young people will become care leavers within the next 2 years requiring support with accommodation, employment education and training and transition into independence.
- 2.7. Corporate Parenting is a duty of all local authorities and their partners. It relates to how they collectively demonstrate that children and young people who are either cared for or have a care experience of the local authority receive the best support and chances they can possibly have. Devon's corporate parenting approach is in place to ensure that we share high aspirations for and with our young people, demonstrate that we care not just for, but about them, and help them to recover from previous experiences. Helping them to achieve their own goals as they grow, develop, and mature. It is also about removing barriers and designing systems which support their protective characteristics as a care experience young person and part of our whole Devon family.
- 2.8. The Corporate Parenting Strategic Board is chaired by Councillor Leadbetter, Lead Member for Children. Following presentation by young people in spring 2023, it was evident that further work was required to improve the scope and format of the Board, to strengthen its role in driving improvement for young people.
- 2.9. The direction of change was consolidated by a visit from Mark Riddell - DfE National Advisor for Care Leavers in late June 2023. Mr Riddell made a series of recommendations as follows:
  - Develop a Champion Model approach to corporate parenting.
  - Strengthening Corporate Parenting board membership.
  - Employment of a Care Leaver Champion.
  - Develop Care Leaver Guarantees.
  - Review the housing policies relevant to Care Leavers.
  - Develop transitional planning pathways.
  - Develop a Joint Protocol with the Department of Work and Pensions.
  - Aspirations Audit of children in care and care leavers.
  - Continue to hold Business Events to increase Education Training and Employment options.
  - Develop the Family Business Offer.
  - Not apply intentional homelessness decisions to care leavers and give Care Leavers priority housing.
  - Consider the development of training flats.
  - Review the Local Offer to include partnership offers.
  - Develop an offer that considers key groups such as UASC, care leavers in custody and young parents.

2.10. Throughout Autumn 2023, work was undertaken to reset the Board under its new structure, with the overarching Strategic Board setting the agenda of 5 Corporate Parenting Subgroups, each leading on a core area of improvement activity for both children in our care and care leavers. The revised structure was developed to support the delivery of the recommendations from Mark Riddell's visit to Devon County Council and encapsulated his suggestions to improve our member and senior leadership oversight of the work through the chairing of each subgroup.

2.11. The structure of the new strategic board and its subgroups is as follows:



### 3.0. Update and Impact

3.1. The new Strategic Board and Subgroups came into effect on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2023. The Corporate Board ratified the model and included partner agencies co-opted into the groups to work on the proposed workstreams for each area.

3.2. The chairs were formally appointed, all from the Devon County Council Cabinet, and senior officers were appointed from across the Council and Districts to co-chair each of the five subgroups.

#### 3.3. In brief the subgroups cover as follows:

**3.3.1. Talented Me** – issues relating to the education of cared for children in Devon and a focus on supporting Education, Training and Employment activity for care leavers.

**3.3.2. Healthy Me** – leading on the development of the support needs of cared for children in terms of their physical and emotional health, the partnership approach to this, and then transitional arrangements through to adult social care and health where needed. It also has a focus on the needs of care experienced people who have

significant emotional health needs, but who sit below the threshold for adult services intervention.

- 3.3.3. Care For Me** – this subgroup has a specific focus on sufficiency issues for children in our care, or those care experienced people. It has a priority focus on the needs of young people who are 18 and over who have left our care, and their housing offers. The remit of this subgroup is to focus on supporting our young people currently in unsuitable accommodation and how they can be supported to move into suitable accommodation. The subgroup also has a focus on how to improve housing options for the future so that housing needs are better planned for from the onset with the understanding of needs at an earlier stage.
- 3.3.4. Involve Me** – This subgroup has a remit to ensure that the voice of children in our care, and that of those who are care experienced is part of our service development and improvement journey, as well as the development of the Devon Local Offer to our Care Experienced People, and the monitoring of the roll out of total respect training.
- 3.3.5. Welcome and Support Me** – This subgroup has a remit to have key focus on specific groups of young people for example young people at risk of exploitation, Young Asylum Seekers (of which there are 78 current children in care and 59 care experienced people) and Care Experienced People who are pregnant and parenting of which there are currently 67 care leavers in this cohort. The subgroup will consider and develop access to enrichment activities.

**3.4. Impact of the new structure so far:**

- 3.4.1. There has been a visioning session completed where all members of the board and the subgroup members invited to consider our collective vision for Corporate Parenting, with a range of proposals offered. The vision statement is to be confirmed at the next Corporate Parenting Board meeting to be held 24th April 2024.
- 3.4.2 The vision statements have been circulated to young people from the Stand Up, Speak Up Council who have been involved in choosing their preferred option too from an “involve me,” perspective.

**3.5. The options are as follows:**

- a) We are working together for a Devon where every child and young person who is in care or care experienced thrives in an environment of love, support, and empowerment.
- b) We will provide holistic support tailored to the unique needs of each child and young person who is in care or care experienced to break down barriers and unlock their full potential.
- c) Be a catalyst for positive change working collaboratively with families, communities, and stakeholders to create a network of support that extends beyond immediate care, laying the foundation for a brighter and more promising future.

- d) Together, we will build a Devon where every child in care is surrounded by love, opportunities, and the belief that their dreams are valid and achievable. When they leave our care, they will feel prepared and supported for their onward journey and experience happiness and success.
- e) We work together to be loving parents for our children in care and care experienced young people. We have high aspirations for them and do everything we can to support them to live a fulfilling, successful life.

3.5.1. For clarity the preference of our children and young people is option d.

### **3.6. Talented Me:**

#### **3.6.1. This group have achieved the following:**

- Have secured resource to build a Talent and Aspirations bank to collect the aspirations, qualifications, and attributes of young people in care and care leavers aged 11-21. This will be matched up with offers of work experience, mentoring and apprenticeship offers from across Devon Corporate Partnership and business partners.
- Have worked with procurement so that any contracts awarded include an offer of some support with a form of Education, Training and Employment activity for our young people.
- Have held business round tables in Exeter and North Devon to engage businesses in offering employment options and work experience.
- Have developed Positive About Care Experience (PACE) with Exeter College to support businesses with their support to Care Experienced People entering the workplace or apprenticeships.
- Have increased Devon County Council Apprenticeships for Care Experienced People to six.

#### **3.6.2. The group aims to complete the following:**

- For the Talent and Aspiration Bank to be live for Care Experienced People and older children in our care from April 2024.
- Establish an Aspirations Officer in the virtual school by August 2024.
- Launch of PACE Programme Spring 2024.
- Aim to develop six or more further Devon County Council apprenticeships for Care Experienced People by Summer 2024.
- Work with Human Resources to support Care Experienced People to obtain employment with Devon County Council when they may not yet meet the person specification due to English and Maths qualifications but could be supported to undertake these as functional skills, alongside employment.

3.6.3. As highlighted above, there is work being undertaken through the subgroup to improve Education Training and Employment figures for Care Leavers. These are not yet translating into impact for our young people. At the end of September 40% of

Care Leavers were in Education Employment and Training, at the end of January this has risen to 41%.

3.6.4. Whilst it is acknowledged that there is more to achieve in the coming months, between September 2023 and January 2024, Education Training and Employment Personal Advisors have offered support as highlighted below:

- Young people supported into an apprenticeship within Council and in Business 13
- Young people supported into full time Employment 14
- Young people supported into part time Employment 12
- Young People Supported into full time Education 11
- Young People Supported into part time Education 14

### **3.7. Healthy Me:**

#### **3.7.1. This group have achieved the following:**

- Delivery of 200 Ask Jan App subscriptions for Care Experienced People.
  - There is access to 100 Ask Jan subscriptions of which 40 have been allocated.
- Job description for two emotional health workers embedded in the Corporate Parenting Service to support engagement with Care Experienced People who are below the CAMHS and Adult mental health thresholds. These posts are advertised and will be recruited to on a two-year fixed term contract.

#### **3.7.2. The group continue to work on the following:**

- Employment of the Emotional Health Workers – Target Spring 2024
- Review decline in Review Health Assessment Activity for 16- and 17-year-olds – Target Summer 2024
- Develop stronger pathways to better engage 16- and 17-year-olds in Health Assessment Activity

### **3.8. Care For Me:**

#### **3.8.1 This group have achieved the following:**

- Are developing a much clearer understanding of capacity versus demand for both children in our care and care experienced people.
- Have improved the focus on joint working between Devon County Council and District Councils.
- Joint training workshop in January 2024
- Have agreement to achieve sign off for the 16/17 plus joint housing protocol.
- Have agreement to achieve sign off for the Care Leavers Joint Housing Protocol.
- Are reviewing best practice around housing matters in other local authorities.
- Have heard from providers to better understand tenancy support needs of Care Experienced People.

- Oversight of the Pan Devon Council Tax exemption for Care Experienced People.

### **3.8.2 The group continue to work on the following:**

- Completing sign off of for relevant protocols – Target April 2024.
- Developing team around the tenancy options.
- Review of tenancy costs for young people and how to support those who are in Education Training and Employment to afford tenancy.
- Review of some building assets across Devon to consider if these can be made available to create housing options for Care Leavers.
- Review of Section 106 agreements and if these are impacting on the availability of single accommodation for Care Leavers.

**3.8.3.** At the time of the last Ofsted Monitoring Visit in September 2023, there were 33 care experienced people in emergency or temporary accommodation, as of 22<sup>nd</sup> February, there are 24.

3.8.4. The Personal Advisors maintain weekly direct contact with Care Leavers in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Their accommodation circumstances are also reviewed fortnightly in the unsuitable accommodation panel which is attended by Children Social Care leadership and Housing Managers. There is work underway across the partnership to explore the emotional and mental health support needs of this cohort of Vulnerable Young People and the support needs of any young people who are entering or who are leaving custody. Monthly meetings are held with Chief Executives of Devon District Councils, Devon County Council and senior leaders in health and adult social care to tackle the needs of this cohort of young people. The Care Leaving Service is also working collectively with housing partners to prevent more young people losing housing duty to individual district councils so that housing challenges are not compounded, and where needed challenging and escalating issues robustly to prevent young people entering unsuitable accommodation or becoming homeless.

3.8.5. The remainder of young people are in suitable accommodation ranging from their own tenancies, to supported accommodation, or staying put with their foster carers. There are 52 care leavers who have remained with their former foster carers as staying put arrangements which is important for them but has an obvious impact on fostering sufficiency.

3.8.6. Since July 2023, when unsuitable accommodation panel commenced, 61 young people have moved out of unsuitable accommodation. However, with an increasing adolescent care cohort, greater numbers have since entered into unsuitable accommodation with specific vulnerabilities and needs that require a support package for them to prepare and successfully live independently. A key priority of the childrens service is the development of an adolescent service capable of addressing extra-familial harm and reducing the numbers of new adolescent entries into care.

3.8.7. Out of the current 18 young people in B&B accommodation 7 have made an application to Devon Home Choice and are being supported to bid for properties. As we develop a Team around the Tenancy Model, these young people who will be supported by this.

3.8.8. There are 146 care leavers in supported accommodation across Devon of which 24 care leavers are ready to move into their own tenancy and 13 are actively bidding for properties. Supported accommodation for care leavers is a short-term provision and aims to support young people to address their vulnerabilities and to support them with developing independent skills so they are in tenancy ready.

### **3.9. Involve Me:**

#### **3.9.1. This group have achieved the following:**

- Have heard from Coram Voice to understand issues facing children in care and care experienced people nationally and in Devon and considered the messages of Devon's children and young people against a national picture.
- Dissemination of the results of the Bright Spots Survey across the corporate parenting partnership.
- Developed a now advertised apprenticeship for a Young Corporate Parenting Lead who will be the conduit between the Corporate Parenting Partnership and the Children in Care and Care Experience People of Devon.

#### **3.9.2. The group continue to work on the following:**

- Refresh of the Care Leavers Guarantee and Local Offer – Target April 2024
- The refresh of the Promise to children in our care – Target April 2024.
- The response to the Bright Spots Survey – You Said, We Did – Target Summer 2024.
- Are working with Coram Voice to consider how to best understand the lived experience of younger (4–11-year-old) children in our care in Devon – Target Autumn 2024
- Oversight of the development of the new Children in Care Assessment and Review Document – Target Summer 2024

3.9.3 There is other significant activity that is being undertaken with and by our children and care experience people so that we hear and understand their voice. This includes the following:

- Training people across DCC and the Partnership on what it means to be care experienced (Total Respect Training). This has been delivered to various members, leaders across social care, Personal Advisors, Cohorts of Social Workers in the Children in Care Service, and the Culture and Change Team. The next cohorts to receive this training are Foster Carers and Independent Reviewing Officers.
- Presentation at the health and well-being board on mental health support services in Devon County Council.
- Working with Young Asylum Seekers to create a welcome pack for new young people joining this cohort.



- Presentation and an exercise delivered at a joint learning event for housing officers and personal advisors across Devon about housing for care leavers.
- Creation of a Top Tips for Moves – helping social workers and foster carers think about how to help a young person when they have a change of care arrangement.
- Delivery of training to prospective foster carers on the Skills to Foster training.

### **3.10. Welcome and Support Me**

#### **3.10.1 This group have achieved the following:**

- Have made a bid application to the UK Foundations Network around increasing life opportunities for Care Experienced People with a focus on the following:
  - Care Leavers Building sustainable relationships outside of the statutory sector.
  - Developing skills to maintain tenancies.
  - Enhancing engagement with relevant mental health services.
  - Developing opportunities for care leavers to build productive connections in their communities through volunteering and participation.
- The group have a focus on understanding lifelong links for our children and young people and how we can ensure that all young people have these.
- The group are developing links with Exeter University to jointly review offers to children in care and young asylum seekers.

#### **3.10.2. The group continue to work on the following:**

- Understanding risks of exploitation for children in our care and care experienced people and how to support and mitigate these.
- Reviewing the support needs of children in our care and care experienced people in contact with the criminal justice system

#### **3.10.3. Additional matters:**

- In addition to the above detail of the varied workstreams, Mark Riddell returned to Devon in December 2023 to review our activity in this regard since his initial visit in June 2023. He was impressed with the progress of the partnership, and the development of our champion model. In his letter he highlighted the rapid progress made in our offer to care leavers and was impressed by the approach of leaders and managers.
- However, the most important feedback in terms of impact is what our care leavers and young people are starting to say. They are feeding back in different places that there is a different feel in terms of their voice being heard, that we as a system are more engaged with them and trying to improve their service based on their feedback, and that they are also experiencing more relationship practice from their Personal Advisors. This initial feedback is positive to receive and provides a strong platform for increasing our impact in the Corporate Parenting arena.

## **4.0. Options / Alternatives**

- 4.1. The new structure of the Board is starting to embed and show some developing impact given the short time that it has been in effect. Therefore, the recommendation at this stage is to consider and endorse the revised arrangements of the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 4.2. Moving forward, there is a plan to develop a series of data streams to support the work of the overarching Strategic Board and the Subgroups.

## **5.0. Consultations / Representations / Technical Data**

- 5.1. As noted above, external scrutiny from the DfE National Advisor for Care Leavers has recognised the amount of work that has gone into the development of the new structure, and the recognition that there has already started to be an impact of this.

## **6.0. Strategic Plan**

- 6.1. The Corporate Parenting Strategic Board and the Subgroup Champion Model aligns strongly with the Council's Strategic Plan regarding the key priorities of "Being Ambitious for Children and Young People," and Helping communities to be safe, connected and resilient.
- 6.2. This specifically links to supporting the health and emotional wellbeing offer, closing the attainment gap for vulnerable groups, strengthening apprenticeship and employment offers, tackling social isolation, tackling homelessness and developing participation.

## **7.0. Financial Considerations**

- 7.1. There are no additional financial considerations currently.

## **8.0. Legal Considerations**

- 8.1. There are no specific legal considerations.

## **9.0. Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)**

- 9.1. The continuation of the Strategic Board and its Subgroups will have a neutral impact on the environment.

## **10.0. Equality Considerations**

- 10.1. Devon County Council has recognised care experience as a protected characteristic. The Corporate Parenting Strategic Board and its subgroups are ambitious for our

children in care and care experienced people, and unashamedly positively discriminate for them.

## **11.0. Risk Management Considerations**

11.1. No risks have been identified with the exception that to change the structure of the Board now again would have a negative impact on the positive work that is being undertaken and this would have a reputational risk to the Council.

## **12.0. Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations**

12.1. The new structure for Corporate Parenting Strategic Board and its subgroups is starting to embed and is having a positive impact at this stage. This has been recognised by the DfE National Advisor for Care Leavers who was impressed by the pace of our progress, and importantly some of our young people. There is more work to do to build on this initial progress to ensure that the planned strategic work has the direct impact on frontline practice and ultimately children and young people.

12.2. The service recommendation is that there should be no changes to the structure for the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board at this time this is allowed to continue to develop and embed.

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### **Electoral Divisions: All**

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