

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2014/2015

Improving outcomes for looked after children and
care leavers



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Foreword

Message from Cllr Simon Hackett and Cllr Julie Webb

Chair & Vice Chair of Corporate Parenting Board

"What if this was my child, what would I want for them?"

We are very pleased to present the second annual report for the Corporate Parenting Board.

Significant progress has been made over the past two years, and specifically in the last twelve months. We have put the building blocks in place for sustainable improvement to our services for children and our priority moving forward is for Children's Social Care to get to "good" within the next two years.

Against this backdrop, the Corporate Parenting Board is also on an improvement journey and has focused on improving its way of working this year. The aim is to further maximise the impact, develop effectiveness and enhance the links with looked after children, foster carers and other agencies to improve understanding of the issues faced by children in care.

The Corporate Parenting Board has been strengthened and children's views now influence decision-making. Both the Looked after Young People's Board and Care Leavers Forums now have representatives sitting as members of the Corporate Parenting Board. Children in Care and Care Leavers influenced the creation of the Looked after Children's and Care Leavers' Pledge, which reflect issues that are important to them. The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) will continue to work

closely with the Looked after Young People's Board and listen to the views of Children in Care, and the Care Leavers Forum.

In June this year the Corporate Parenting Board initiated a workshop with our children and partners, to look at the priorities underpinning corporate parenting. The workshop was presented by children and young people in co-production with lead officers within Children's Services. One of the key outcomes of the workshop was to propose revisions to the Looked after Children's Strategy and to inform the development of the Improvement Plan 2015-2017.

A key recent achievement has been the development of a revised Looked After Children's Strategy. Over the next few months, the CPB will be reviewing governance arrangements in order to be fit for purpose to drive the delivery of the strategy.

As Corporate Parents we are aware that we have responsibility for one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Many of the children in our care are with us because of neglect, family dysfunction or abuse or other forms of family breakdown.

Our responsibility for looking after the children and young people in our care and who have left care continues to be one of the most important things the Council does and we, will continue to demonstrate our commitment to ensure that all our looked after children and care leavers have the best start in life.

When assessing the quality of service being provided, we as members of the Corporate Parenting Board will always have at the forefront of our minds "If it's not good enough for my children, it's not good enough for our Looked after Children."

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We would like to thank everyone, partners, staff and especially young people who have contributed to the progress we have made on the journey so far. We are confident that if we continue to build effective partnerships the outcomes for Looked after Children in Sandwell will continue to improve.



Councillor Hackett, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Message from the Chair of the Looked after Young People's Board

We are very pleased with the progress and achievement not only over the past 12 months but over the past 2 years. As a Board we have been very busy representing the views of children in care and continuing and improving what we achieved the previous year.

The Looked after Young People's Board are a group of young people of different ages and backgrounds who work hard to represent Sandwell's children in care. The Board meets fortnightly to talk about the issues that matter to children in care. All the LAYP members are vital in making sure that children's voices are heard when it comes to decisions that affect their lives. It is not an easy job and they do it for the young people. We have also got a wider membership on our Facebook page which reaches out to the wider looked after children population.

This hard work was commended by the Looked after Young People's Board receiving the prestigious Diana Award which is a nationally recognised accolade, and was presented to the Board in London in March 2015. The LAYP Board was honoured with the Diana Champion Volunteers Award for its commitment and work over the past year.

Over the past 12 months we also had the OFSTED inspectors visit the Board in February, and gave us a positive response in the published report:

“The Children in Care Board is well established and representatives are enthusiastic about their role and have strong support from the participation officer. Members of the group sit on the Corporate

Parenting Board and children's contributions influence the decisions that affect their lives" (Ofsted 2015)

The key achievements we have made this year include:

LACE Awards

We also planned the Looked after Children's Education Awards in November. More than 350 people attended the awards including Mayor Councillor Derek Rowley, young people, carers, social workers and senior managers. It was the first time the event was planned and hosted by the Looked after Young People's Board. Award categories included attendance, outstanding achievement, effort at school, exam success.

Participation Event

The participation event was held in May 2015 and yet again was a success from the previous year with over 100 young people, carers and professionals attending. The activities on offer were information stalls, recreational and positive activities, with a presentation from the Looked after Young People's Board.

We have also been involved in:

- Representing children in care's views on the Looked after Children's Education Virtual School Governing Body
- Delivered training to Foster Carers
- We have also got a wider membership on our Facebook page which reaches out to the wider looked after children population.
- Consulted on documents such as the Looked after Children's Strategy and Children Services Improvement Plan.

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- We have been involved in the SHAPE our future initiatives such as the conference, talent show and youth festival.
- Representation on the Corporate Parenting Board
- Continue to deliver training at the Social Work Induction Programme and to Councillors around responsibilities around corporate parenting.
- The 2nd edition of the Looked after Children's magazine for children in care called Love & Care magazine.
- Interview Panels-Principal Social Worker, MST Therapists/Supervisor and Social Worker Recruitments.
- Support the LAC Audit commissioned to changing our lives to consult with children in care.
- We have been instrumental in developing the Health Passport.
- We have also developed the Looked after Children's Review booklet.
- Work collaboratively with the Care Leavers Forum.

We will continue to work hard as a young people's board and work closely with the corporate parents to ensure the best outcomes are achieved for children in care.

We would like your continued support for all children in care.

Chelsea Thompson

Chairperson of Looked After Young Persons Board



Message from the Chair of the Care Leavers' Forum

The 18+ care leavers' forum is a voice for care leavers who meet fortnightly on a Wednesday evening at Sandwell Council House.

We have just recently started to have representatives involved with the corporate parenting board to ensure the issues for care leavers are improved around housing, health and wellbeing and transition to adulthood. These issues are important and we have been instrumental in highlighting these issues in the workshop delivered to corporate parents and partners in June 2015.

The Care Leavers' Forum main aim is to help care leavers. It's about young people having a voice to improve services for other young people. The 18+ care leavers' forum aims to bring in experiences from different young people and give them the opportunity to improve services for future looked after children and future care leavers.

Our achievements are:

Planned Care Leavers' Event:

This event was held in October 2014

- Started a business plan to inspect children's homes/training flats/accommodation
- Work closely with Talent Match and Sandwell Guarantee representing young people's views with regard to employment, training and education opportunities for care leavers
- Representative on Fostering Panel
- Develop newsletter for Care Leavers

- Facebook page for Care Leavers
- Recruit new members
- Monitor Care Leavers Charter
- Launch Care Leavers Charter at Care Leavers Event as part of Care Leavers Week

In the coming year as well as building on the achievements above we also plan to:

- Develop Housing Options leaflet
- Develop a peer mentoring programme to support children currently in care.

Matthew O' Toole

Chair of Care Leavers' Forum

1. Introduction

The purpose of the Board is to ensure that the Council effectively discharges its role as Corporate Parent for all the children and young people in its care.

The key function of the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) is to ensure that positive action is taken to either improve or address any shortcomings in services provided by the council and its partners to Looked after Children and Young People (LAC). Going forward, the CPB will be responsible for driving the delivery of the Looked After Children Strategy. It is also responsible for overseeing that the Council and its partners deliver on the commitments made in the Sandwell Pledge and Care Leavers Charter.

Looked After Children Strategy 2015/16

The intention is to significantly strengthen the role of the CPB over the coming year to enable it to drive forward and monitor the revised LAC Strategy. The draft Looked After Children Strategy was presented to CPB on 16th September 2015. The LAC Strategy sets out a series of key activities under seven strategic objectives.

This strategy seeks to set out how Sandwell Council, together with partner agencies, will ensure that we meet the needs of all looked after children and be effective corporate parents. Throughout, the focus is on describing what will change in relation to our work with children on the edge of care and looked after children. The document, therefore,

captures key activities for the future rather than an attempt to cover every detail of our current services and support.

Sandwell's strategy to parenting looked after children has the following seven strategic objectives:

Strategic Objective 1: Support families to stay together

Strategic Objective 2: Manage risk confidently and support families at the edge of care

Strategic Objective 3: Provide and commission a flexible and affordable range of high quality placements

Strategic Objective 4: Secure timely permanence for children and young people

Strategic Objective 5: Help children and young people to thrive and achieve

Strategic Objective 6: Enable children and young people to participate fully in decision making and service design

Strategic Objective 7: Support care leavers

The Sandwell Pledge is based on what children and young people have told us what is most important to them and that is:

- Being Fit and Healthy
- Staying Safe from Harm
- Having a good education and enjoying your interests

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- Giving your views, to make a difference for positive change
- Getting you ready for independence

The promise made to Care Leavers in the Care Leavers Charter is:

- To believe in you
- To listen to you
- To inform you
- To support you
- To find you a home
- To be a life- long champion

The Corporate Parenting Board does this not only by gaining knowledge of the services being provided, but also by being actively involved and by engaging with and listening to the views of children and young people who are looked after at every opportunity. The effective partnership between the Corporate Parenting Board and the Looked after Young Peoples' Board (LAYPB) is therefore critical.

The Corporate Parenting Board meets at least 6 times per year. The current board membership consists as follows:

- Cabinet Member for Children's Services
- 4 Councillors
- 2 representatives from the LAYPB

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In addition the Board is supported by a number of advisors including the Director of Children's Services, the Virtual Head, the Designated Doctor and the Designated Nurse for Looked after Children.

In order to drive the delivery of the LAC Strategy, governance of the CPB including its terms of reference will be reviewed before the end of the year.

2. Progress over the past 12 months

Over the past 12 months, the Corporate Parenting Board has overseen a number of activities.

We have continued to listen to, encourage and support the efforts of both the LAYPB and the Care Leavers' Forum. The Board has also encouraged the development and widening of the scope of the Participation Team.

The CPB has continued to monitor services provided to LAC and care leavers from achieving permanence to health plans and opportunities for young people who are Not in Education Employment and Training (NEET). This information is provided via a series of datasets. The CPB has continued to provide challenge to managers on how services can be further improved. They have requested further research, updates or actions where needed.

The CPB workshop held on 17 June 2015 provided an opportunity, for elected members including the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, officers from the council, partner agencies and young people to discuss a number of key themes.

Topics covered in the workshop included, the LAC strategy, the LAC Pledge and Care Leavers' Charter, the Ofsted report and the Children's Services Improvement Plan and the Corporate Parenting Board annual report. The LAC Strategy has been reviewed in line with the views expressed at this workshop.

The number of health assessments being undertaken has remained consistently high throughout the year and in May 2015 the Health Passport, developed in consultation with the LAYPB was launched. The

passport is designed for young people in care approaching their 18th Birthday. The passport contains valuable information about family health history and an immunisation record. It also contains top tips about staying healthy when young people have left care. (Contributing towards **Strategic Objective 5 of the LAC Strategy**)

The CPB has also been a driver for 'SHAPE our future', a Sandwell initiative specifically designed to encourage internal and external partners to support children and young people to express their views and ideas and where possible turn their ideas into actions. Following a youth conference and survey in December 2014, there has been a SHAPE talent completion in March 2015 and a SHAPE youth festival in August 2015. In addition, Neighbourhood Services also arranged for activities to take place in the main parks in each of the 6 towns every day throughout the school summer holidays. The SHAPE agenda is youth-led including members of the LAYPB and Care Leavers' Forum. The next event will be the 2nd annual youth conference which is due to take place in November 2015. (Contributing towards **Strategic Objective 6**).

The Changing Our Lives survey was commissioned by Children Services to find out the extent to which Children's Services works effectively with children and young people in a person centred way, putting them at the heart of planning and support. The key headlines of the survey were the lack of consistent consultation with children and young people by both social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers. Also, a key recommendation was made for different to engage with young people actively participating and/or contributing to the LAYPB Board. This mirrors many of the findings within the Advocacy report. This report is produced by the Children's Society and the issues picked up by

the Sandwell Advocacy Forum, which is subsequently fed back to the CPB. This has explicitly incorporated in the Improvement Plan and the revised LAC Strategy (**Strategic Objective 6**).

Within the past 12 months, care leavers have been actively involved with the Fostering Panel in helping to determine the suitability of potential foster carers. A significant issues highlighted in the June Workshop was the current disparity within the foster carer cohort. Care leaver's involvement in the Fostering Panel represents a meaning step forward in ensuring foster carers more consistently provide the level of care expected of a corporate parent. (Contributing to **Strategic Objective 5 and 6**).

In the last year, Children's Services has thoroughly revised its recruitment process of social workers. A key element of the recruitment is the direct involvement of young people and care leavers within the interviewing process. There are number of benefits including determining candidate's ability to engage with and understand young people's wishes and views as well as young people actively determining to whom social work positions are offered. (Contributing to **Strategic Objective 5 and 6**).

As referenced earlier in the message from the Chair of the LAYP Board, the LACE Awards and Participation Event were particularly successful in celebrating Looked After Children's individual educational achievements. The Participation Event enabled a wider multi agency understanding of the work, progress and aspirations of the LAYP Board. (Contributing to **Strategic Objective 5**).

Significant progress has been achieved over the past year. The revised LAC Strategy provides the CPB with the framework for additional focus over the coming year. The next section identifies some of the key activities over the following year to drive the delivery of the LAC Strategy.

3. Looking Forward

The priorities for Corporate Parenting Board for the coming year include:

- Revise the terms of reference of the CPB to drive the delivery of the LAC Strategy
- Sign off of the LAC Strategy at Cabinet in December 2015
- Establish robust monitoring arrangements for reporting progress against the LAC Strategy to CPB
- Ensure the delivery of the Children's Services Improvement Plan 2015-2017
- Work with partners to improve access to and the quality of CAMHS in Sandwell.
- Endorse the implementation of the New Belongings Initiative in Sandwell. This is a programme designed to improve services for care leavers
- Increase the use of advocacy services by children and young people in care
- Overview the work programme of the participation team to ensure it continues to develop opportunities for young people to have their say and genuinely influence service delivery
- Ensure that the commitments within LAC Pledge and Care Leavers Charter continue to be implemented and reviewed
- Implement the care leaver's forum's plan for the inspection of homes, training flats and accommodation
- Ensure young person friendly review plans are introduced to encourage more children and young people to engage in their LAC reviews

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- Ensure that the council training offer to foster carers includes training on managing behaviour and communicating with young people and Child Sexual Exploitation
- Improve young people's involvement in the recruitment of foster carers
- Continue to support SHAPE our Future initiatives
- Establish a multi-agency sub-group to monitor and provide update reports on progress in delivering key activities as agreed by the Board.

4. Conclusion

The period 2014 to 2015 has seen the Corporate Parenting Board build on the solid foundations built in the previous year. Members of the CPB are more knowledgeable about Children's Services and are better equipped to provide the necessary support and challenge the service needs to deliver on its overall objective of "Getting to Good".

We recognise that the improvement journey is continuing and the service provided to the children in our care is getting better year on year.

The aim of the Board in 2015 is to ensure the continuation of our improvement journey and that the capacity of the CPB is further developed to drive the delivery of the LAC Strategy. We will ensure that not only Children's Services but also internal and external partners including our young people and care leavers continue to work together to bring about the next necessary step change on the journey to "Getting to Good".