

West Berkshire
Corporate Parenting Panel
Annual Report 2023-2024
Children and Family Services



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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Welcome to the annual report of West Berkshire Corporate Parenting Panel. This sets out the activity of the Panel for 23/24 period and will outline some development happening over the coming year.
- 1.2. Corporate Parenting means giving the same level of care and support that any parent would want for their own child. Parenting does not simply stop as a young person reaches maturity, so this responsibility extends to helping children in care successfully transition to independent adulthood.
- 1.3. Celebrating children and young people is also important, many will have attended this year celebration event and the care leavers summer party.
- 1.4. Our young people are part of our Panel, and bring their lived experiences to enable a constant review of the work completed and offer provided to children in care and care leavers.
- 1.5. The report is intended to give all corporate parents oversight of the Panel, our pledge to children in care and care leavers and to ensure both as a council and a partnership we fulfil our duties as a corporate parent.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Corporate parenting means promoting the same outcomes that any good parent wants for their child.
- 2.2. This responsibility for local authorities and their partners is set out in legislation, government publications and statutory guidance.
- 2.3. During the financial year 2023-24, the Corporate Parenting Panel has met quarterly, the Panel is co-chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Families Service and a care experienced young person.
- 2.4. The Panel received and scrutinised a number of report over this period relating to child rein care or care leaver, this includes annual reports by:
 - Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Service- Independent Reviewing Officer - Annual Report
 - ICB Annual Report- Health of Children in Care
 - Fostering Annual Report
 - Adopt Thames Valley Annual Report
 - Virtual School Annual Report
 - Local Authority Designated Officer Annual Report
 - Foster Carer Independent Reviewing Officer Report
 - Youth Justice Plan
- 2.5. The Panel, each time they meet, review a wealth of data to ensure oversight, and scrutiny of the lived experience of children in local authority care, this allows for debate and challenge from Panel members. This data includes social care, education and health information.
- 2.6. Although there is more to do, the Panel has ensured children and young people voice is present and heard and West Berkshire foster carers are active members of the Panel. A care-experienced young person co-chairs the panel which brings a critical element to the panel and ensure all discussions remain focused on outcome for children and young people.

- 2.7. In many cases, young people contributed to the reports and presentations which came to Board, particularly the leaving care item. The children in council 'R'Vue' attended panel on two occasions, giving the panel insight into their activities and sharing their experiences.
- 2.8. This is West Berkshires first Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report.

3. Governance and Statutory Context

3.1. What is corporate parenting?

- 3.2. Local authorities and their partners are responsible for ensuring that care-experienced children and young people are as safe and well cared for as any other child. This responsibility is called 'corporate parenting' and applies equally to children who have entered the UK from overseas and are separated from their families. Corporate parenting duty rests not only with social workers and their managers, but also any other agency that provides services and support to children in care such as health services, housing departments, the police and schools. Corporate parents have specific duties for young people leaving care and making the journey to independence.

3.3. Legal background

- 3.4. The collective responsibility for local authorities was first laid out in the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The central role of councils as effective corporate parents has been emphasised by government in the publications *Care Matters: Time for Change* (DCSF 2007), *Care Matters: Time to Deliver* (DCSF 2008), and consolidated in aspects of the Children and Young Persons Act (2008). Other legislation and statutory guidance that determine our duties include:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 Children and Adoption Act 2006
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (as amended by the Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014
- The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018
- Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2000

3.5. Principles of corporate parenting

3.6. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 provided a welcome distillation of corporate parenting responsibilities through seven principles of corporate parenting, which local authorities and their partners are required to adhere:

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.

3.7. The Act introduced some new responsibilities relating to children in care and care leavers. These include a requirement to publish a 'Local Offer to Care Leavers,' setting out the services available to young people leaving care, extend the provision of personal adviser support to all care leavers up to the age of 25 and to provide education advice and guidance to young people formerly in care. The Act also introduces several requirements to ensure that court processes are focussed on long term plans for and specific needs of the child.

3.8. The Care Leavers Charter and Pledge to Children in Care

3.9. The Care Leavers' Charter is a set of promises to care leavers, published by the Government in 2012. It is "Designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good corporate parents." The Charter will "Remain constant through any changes in legislation, regulation and guidance." We promise:

- To respect and honour your identity
- To listen to you
- To believe in you
- To inform you
- To be a lifelong champion
- To support you

- To find you a home

3.10. West Berkshire are reviewing and revising the Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers, and this will be a priority for the coming year.

3.11. The current pledge can be found at Appendix 1

3.12. Children in Care Council

3.13. R:Vue (West Berks' Children in Care Council) is for young people in care aged 11 - 17. R:Vue with the intention to ensure young people's voices are heard and help West Berkshire Council to improve the services that children in care and leaving care receive. It is also an opportunity for young people in care to socialise with each other and have fun. R:Vue regularly attend Panel alongside care experienced young people to ensure their voice is heard by those people making decisions.

3.14. R:Vue activities during 2023-24 include:

3.14.1. R:Vue have been involved in several projects including reviewing the Pledge. The group had a tour of West Berkshire Council Chamber, and the Chief Executive's Office led by Dave Wraight. They also discussed with him the topics that are included in the Pledge that are important to them. In other sessions they discussed the leisure activities/facilities in West Berkshire that contributed to the WBC leisure local offer. R:Vue supported children in care to complete in the 'Big Survey' from the Children's Commissioner for England. The Watermill Theatre visited R:Vue to explore projects they would like to take forward into 2024.

3.14.2. Some of the young people from R:Vue sat on interview panels and helped recruit to the following positions in West Berkshire Council: The Virtual School Headteacher, Service Director for Children's Social Care and Service Director for Education and SEN.

3.14.3. R:Vue delivered Total Respect Training to West Berkshire Staff in April 23, July 23, October 23 and February 24. The training is aimed at all those working with children in care and policy makers to ensure the voice of children is heard and incorporated into decisions made about children in care and care leavers. It is hoped that all panel members will have attended the training by the end of the next financial year.

3.14.4. The group really enjoy the social element of R:Vue and some of the activities the group have done include baking, arts and crafts like making clay models, playing pool, basketball and video games. In the Summer holidays there were days out to Cotswold Wildlife Park, Chessington World of Adventures, Blue Reef aquarium and Southsea Beach. At Christmas the group went out for their annual meal at a local restaurant chosen by them.

3.14.5. R:Vue also attend activity days with the Children in Care Councils in Berkshire that include Reading, Bracknell, Wokingham, Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead. They are held in Windsor and always have a theme that the groups come together and discuss. In October they discussed 'what makes a house a home' and in February they discussed 'what makes a good Foster Carer' and this was shown at the recent Foster Carers Conference.

3.15. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

3.16. It is of note that approximately half of the young people receiving leaving care services are, or were, unaccompanied asylum seeking children. West Berks has a history of providing good

quality services to care leavers and we have been an active member of the National Transfer Scheme for a number years and before it was mandated by Government. Our Personal Advisers offered training to our South East Local Authority colleagues during the summer of 2023 on how we respond to new arrivals, help them settle and thrive.

- 3.17. The council receives a grant for each young person seeking asylum. The grant money is to cover all costs in relation to the services provided to them including accommodation, staffing, subsistence and support. The grant money does not meet the full costs, particularly for those over 18 years.

4. Panel Activity

4.1. Membership

- 4.2. The panel is formed of Council Members; Care Experienced young people; Council Officers; Foster Carers and partner agencies including health and education. The core membership is:

| Member | Position/Organisation |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Cllr. Heather Codling | Portfolio Holder, Liberal Democrats. Co-Chair |
| Elisha Stephens | Apprenticeship SEND Youth Participation Worker. Care experienced member, Co-Chair |
| Cllr. Martha Vickers | Liberal Democrats |
| Cllr. Justin Pemberton | Liberal Democrats |
| Cllr. Christopher Read | Liberal Democrats |
| Cllr. Dominic Boeck | Conservative |
| Nigel Lynn | CEO West Berkshire Council |
| AnnMarie Dodds | Executive Director, People- Children's Services |
| Cheryl Cooper | West Berkshire Foster Carers Association |
| Pauline Etheridge | West Berkshire Foster Carers Association |
| Charlotte Duly | Interim Virtual School Headteacher |
| Paul Coe | Executive Director, People- Adult Social Care |
| Dave Wraight | Interim Head of Service, Children and Families |
| Karl Davis | Service Manager Children in Care |
| Dora Gouveia – Scholfield | Principal Social Worker |
| Jane Bell / Lianne Lewis | Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children & Children |
| Tiegan Phillips | Care Experienced Member |
| Rachel Fairhurst | Care Experienced Member |
| Lucy Phillips | Care Experienced Member |
| Sasha Charlesworth | Apprentice Business Support Administrator (YOT). Care experienced Member |
| Melissa Perry | Service Manager Education Welfare |
| Nicola Robertson | QAAS Service Manager |
| Michelle Sancho | Interim Head of Education |
| Andy Higgs | Bucklebury School Headteacher |

4.3. Panel Dates and agendas

4.4. Panels were held on July 11th 2023, October 3rd 2023, December 11th 2023 and March 19th 2024.

4.5. Following the change in administration after the local elections in May 2023 the focus of the July 2023 panel was to introduce new members to the concept and duties of corporate parenting, alongside the operations and responsibilities of the Corporate Parenting Panel. In addition the panel were briefed on:

- The role of the Children in Care Council- by R:Vue young people
- The role of the Virtual School
- Apprenticeships and work opportunities for care leavers
- Health assessments and health support to children and young people

4.6. At the October panel we heard from R:Vue about their summer programme and the activities enjoyed by children in care during the holidays. The budget proposal for next year was recommended by the panel.

4.7. The panel was presented with the annual report from the Integrated Care Board (ICB) in relation to the health of Children in Care (CiC) including an update on the CiC Child and Adolescents Mental Health (CAMH) project, which has brought about stability for several children experiencing difficulty in placement and settling in children who have experienced placement moves. Young people spoke about the success of the Care Leavers Summer Party and the celebrations. The Service Manager for Quality Assurance and Standards (QAAS) presented the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) annual report and the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) annual report.

4.8. A focus of the December 2023 panel was reflecting on the learning from the Ofsted Focussed visit that took place in October 2023 with regards to care leaver services. The panel had several care leavers attend and contribute to the debate. There was learning from the visit for corporate parenting in general and these are being incorporated into action for the coming year. The outcome letter was positive about the progress and experiences of care leavers, particularly the service provided by the Personal Advisors and the relationships they form with young people. The services to young people in specific circumstances- Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers, Care leavers who are parents and those in custody received praise. However, the impact of the corporate parenting panel on driving the progress for children and young people was identified as an improvement area. Actions are taking place into 2024 to improve the panel's oversight and influence. The letter can be found at Appendix 2:

4.9. The March 2024 panel reviewed and supported the proposal for 'Care Leaver' to be treated as a protected characteristic within the council and this is now successfully adopted within the council and related policy and procedures. In addition, there was reflection and congratulations on the successful Annual Achievement Awards. Some ideas were discussed about the arrangements for the next awards and that the ceremony will revert to its October date in 2024.

4.10. Performance and scrutiny

4.11. Each panel scrutinises a suite of performance data in relation to children in care and care leavers.

4.12. This includes data with regards to outcomes for children and young people's placements, education and health.

4.13. The performance data scrutinised at panel for 2023-24 can be found at Appendix 3:

4.14. Corporate Parenting Sufficiency Strategy

- 4.15. Every local authority is required by law to take strategic action, as far as is practicable, to provide sufficient local accommodation to meet the needs of children in care. Local authorities are required to publish a 'sufficiency statement' that sets out how this will be achieved. West Berkshire Sufficiency Statement was written in 2023 and can be found at Appendix 4.
- 4.16. **Care leaver local offer**
- 4.17. Ofsted identified the local offer for care leavers to be basic and not easily accessible. The offer needs to be explicit about the benefits offered to care leavers and evidence the offer being developed in partnership with young people and partner agencies. We have set up a multi-agency working party that includes care experienced young people and members of the panel working towards making the offer more definitive, transparent and accessible. Young people have been working with the council's design team to create web pages for the local offer. A revised version of the offer will be presented to Corporate Board in November.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. This year has seen significant changes in the council and membership of the panel following the change of administration after the May local elections. All activity at the council has been against a backdrop of significant budgetary pressures. This was noted during the Ofsted focussed on the end of 2023. There has been a change of leadership at the very top of children's services with a new Executive Director and a new Service Director arriving in June 2024. Leaders have needed to learn about services and practices and impart their vision for children in care and care leavers.
- 5.2. There has been good progress made in some areas during the year, for example the council adopting 'care leaver' as a protected characteristic and the positive findings by Ofsted about the experiences of care leavers in West Berks. There are several workstreams in place to improve outcomes for children and young people and the panel will keep its focus on driving these improvements and overseeing progress. The panel will ensure all those working with, or have influence over, children's lives are aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities and ask them to report on activity and plans that ensure the highest standards for our children and young people.

6. Plans for 24/25

| Objective | Action | Owner |
|--|---|--------|
| To have a strong and robust Corporate Parenting Panel | Provide mentoring opportunity for CPP chairs | AMD/RW |
| To have a strong and robust Corporate Parenting Panel | Introduce a detailed and themed forward plan for all panels throughout the year | RW |
| To be an excellent corporate parent | To update the Pledge and adopt at Panel | KD |
| Provide young people with clear, up to date, relevant information about their entitlements | Update the Local Offer including both the core entitlements and any discretionary offer from the Local Authority and partners | KD |
| To be an excellent corporate parent | To ensure the local offer is accessible and available to all care leavers on the council's website and social media | KD |
| To be an excellent corporate parent | To take up the offer from the National Leaving Care Adviser to undertake a 2-day | KD |

| | | |
|---|---|--------|
| | evaluation of services in WB | |
| To support Care Leavers financially | Review and update the financial offer to Care Leavers including reduction in council tax | KD |
| To support Care Leavers | Influence other organisations locally to further broaden their Corporate Parenting offer | RW/HC |
| That Corporate Parent Panel drives the response for children/young people | Increase the voice of the child/young people in the Corporate Parenting Panel by supporting children and care leavers to take part in the panel and advocate for their needs. | KD/RW |
| To put the voice of children and young people at the heart of decision making | Formalise participation and voice of the children and Care Leavers in a participation strategy and plan that has a reach across the whole organisation. | AMD/RW |

7. Appendices

7.1. Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers

7.2. Ofsted Focused Visit

7.3. Data Information for Corporate Parenting Panel

7.4. Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2026

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