

Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel

Annual Report 2021-22

Chairman's Foreword

For children who are in Our Care, the council has a legal and moral duty to try to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would give to their children. We should all do our utmost to make sure that all children in our care get a good start in life, and this remains the primary driver behind the Corporate Parenting Panel's work.

This is the fourth year that the Corporate Parenting Panel has produced an annual report, and this is the sixth year that I have had the pleasure to have chaired the panel.

The panel has continued to develop the way in which it carries out its responsibility of improving the lives of our children. We have made alterations to the way members engage with, and consider the views of, children and carers to ensure that they are at the forefront of every decision we make.

We have had several new members join the panel this year following the May 2021 elections. They, along with our returning members, have continued to provide an invaluable service to our children, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them, and our support officers, for their hard work over the past 12 months.



County Councillor Mark Sutton
Chairman of Corporate Parenting Panel
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

1. The Corporate Parenting Role

- 1.1. Children and young people in our care should be cared about and not just cared for; they have a unique place in society. They have a special relationship with the State because they have been taken into our care either by a court order or by voluntary agreement with their birth parents. Central Government, local authorities, partner agencies, individual professionals and carers all share responsibility for ensuring the best for these children and young people – as they would for their own children.
- 1.2. We, as the corporate parent of children in care, have a special responsibility for their well-being and to put them first.
- 1.3. These children and young people's circumstances will have already placed them at a disadvantage. Therefore, we should be their champions in the fight to get what they need and to make sure they are safe. That also means being a powerful advocate to ensure they receive the best of everything and helping them make a success of their lives.
- 1.4. Corporate parenting is most effective when everyone involved in the lives of those in our care by the County Council work together to improve their experiences and outcomes. By becoming interested in the issue of corporate parenting and promoting the welfare of children in our Care and care leavers as part of all of our various roles, we will be helping to discharge the overall responsibility of ensuring the best outcomes for all children and young people in the county.

2. Purpose of Corporate Parenting Panel

- 2.1. The Corporate Parenting Panel is how the Council discharges its responsibility as a corporate parent and brings together councillors, senior officers in children's services and partner agencies to consider key issues which affect children in our care and care leavers.
- 2.2. The panel actively engages with and challenges key partners to provide good support and is ambitious for the children in its care.
- 2.3. The panel works closely with our Children in Care Council and Care Leaver forums to ensure all children in our care have the best possible care, are safe, healthy, happy and achieve. To achieve this, we have an annual thematic work programme in which all partners are called to account.

3. Governance and membership

- 3.1. The panel provides a key role in supporting members to play their role in ensuring accountability for children in our care. Whilst all members of the County Council are corporate parents, members of the Corporate Parenting Panel champion and challenge on behalf of Children in our Care and Care Leavers. The panel is proactive in challenging service delivery and advocates for children in our care and for strong governance principles.

- 3.2. The panel looks to see that the voice of the child is imbedded in all bodies and informs decision-making.
- 3.3. The Work Programme is a working document and as such the panel have requested supplementary reports to further explore any areas of concern or challenge. The current Work Programme can be found in **Appendix 1**.
- 3.4. The panel comprises 15 elected members of the County Council, including the Chair who is the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. Members are appointed annually at the Council meeting in May.
- 3.5. The 2021-22 members were:

Gill Burnett Janet Eagland Ann Edgeller Keith Flunder Richard Ford	Peter Kruskonjic Philip Hudson Carolyn Trowbridge Jill Hood Tom Loughbrough- Rudd	Samantha Thompson Victoria Wilson Syed Hussain John Francis (vice-chair) Mark Sutton (chair)
--	--	--

- 3.6. Members of Staffordshire’s District/ Borough Councils are co-opted onto the panel as champions for children in our care particularly in areas of housing and leisure facilities. The 2021-22 co-opted members were:

Bryan Jones Janice Silvester-Hall Wendy Sutton	Michelle Cook Jenny Barron	Gillian Heesom Barbara Hughes
--	-------------------------------	----------------------------------

- 3.7. Representing Foster Carers, Alan Hudson was appointed to the panel in November 2020 and continues to provide invaluable insight.
- 3.8. The panel is supported by the Assistant Director - Children's Social Care, the Assistant Director - Wellbeing and Partnerships and the Head of Children in Care and Care Leavers. The Head of Performance, QA & Engagement attends every meeting to ensure the voice of the child feeds into the panel’s agendas.
- 3.9. The panel calls on professional advice and assistance/holds to account:
- The Headteacher of the Virtual School.
 - Designated Doctor and Nurse for Children in our Care.
 - County Managers for Fostering, Leaving Care and Adoption.
 - Independent Reviewing Officers.
 - Senior practitioner colleagues.
- 3.10. The panel regularly receives first-hand experience accounts from:
- Children in Care and Care Leavers.
 - Care Leaver Ambassadors.
 - Foster Carers.
- 3.11. The panel’s Terms of reference were originally approved by the panel in 2017. These were refreshed in 2022, the updated version is attached as **Appendix 2**.

3.12. All panel members are required to complete Level 1 Child Protection Training as a minimum.

4. Meetings

4.1. The panel met Eight times over the year as outlined below.

- Four Business meetings – which focussed on quality and performance and held in county buildings (all members to attend).
- Four Discussion/Hot Topic meetings – focussed on specific priority themes identified by young people. These were attended by panel members who had been separated into groups on a rota basis.
- Working Group Meetings – Members, in their allocated groups, also attended working group meetings which focussed on specific outcomes for children and young people. The results of these meetings were fed back to the wider panel at the main Business meeting.

5. Future Meeting Arrangements

5.1. Panel members and officers felt that the sporadic approach to the original meeting format didn't allow an in-depth understanding of subject matter to be developed, neither did it allow for continuity of involvement from members

5.2. To that end a new process has been developed to solidify the future work programme of the Corporate Parenting meetings, thus ensuring a continuity of subject theme and consistent involvement of specified panel members throughout the process from the initial working group meetings, "Hot Topic" Discussion meetings and the final Business Meetings where Topics are discussed in detail by all panel members.

5.3. **Table 1** shows the dates and times for each of the meetings throughout the 2022-23 period, the Topic that will be focussed upon and the specific membership group that will be asked to attend the various meetings.

Cycle No	Cycle Topic	Working Group Voice Project	Hot Topic/Discussion Voice Project	Business Meeting
1	Understand their past	15 March 22 - 5pm Taken Place	25 April 22 - 4:45pm Taken Place	17 May 22 – 10am Taken Place
2	Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers	11 May 22 - 10am Taken Place	20 Jun 22 - 4:45pm Taken Place	12 July 22 – 1:30pm Taken Place
3	Delegated Authority	13 July 22 - 5pm Group 1	19 Sept 22 - 4:45pm Group 1	18 Oct 22 - 10am All members
4	TBC	12 Oct 22 - 5pm Group 2	7 Nov 22 - 4:45pm Group 2	6 Dec 22 - 10am All members
5	Future Themes – Planning & Review	NA	Date TBC by Voice Project – no members to attend	14 Mar 23 - 10am All members

Table 1

5.4. **Table 2** shows the members that have been allocated to each member group.

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
County Members	Gill Burnett Janet Eagland Ann Edgeller Keith Flunder	Richard Ford Peter Kruskonjic Phil Hudson Carolyn Trowbridge Jill Hood	Tom Loughbrough-Rudd Samantha Thompson Victoria Wilson Syed Hussain John Francis
Co-opted Members	Bryan Jones Janice Silvester-Hall Wendi Sutton Alan Hudson	Jenny Barron Michelle Cook Alan Hudson Gillian Heesom	Barbara Hughes Bryan Jones Alan Hudson

Table 2

6. Corporate Parenting Strategy

6.1. The challenge and scrutiny role of the panel remains to be focussed on driving the overarching Corporate Parenting Strategy of 2016-19. The Strategy is currently going through a refresh; however, the key objectives remain relevant:

- Keeping You Safe.
- Where I live.
- Your Education and learning.
- Your wishes, views and feelings.
- Becoming a Care Leaver.
- Your Health and Wellbeing.

7. The Impact of Covid-19

7.1. Whilst Covid-19 has continued to have an impact on the way in which meetings have been held, they have continued to take place. Initial meetings were held virtually, until the relaxation of social distancing rules in July 2021 when the meetings resumed in a face-to-face environment.

7.2. Due to the pandemic, we have not been able to accompany the 'independent visitor' in Regulation 44 visits to our in-house children's homes. These management visits continued to be carried out under the Children's Homes Regulations 2015 by independent visitors alone to provide an opportunity for independent scrutiny of a home. Following the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions, panel members will, following training, once again, begin to accompany the independent visitor at future Regulation 44 visits.

8. Meeting Topics

8.1. Children's Transformation

8.1.1. The panel has considered the ambitious Children's Transformation programme. The aim of the programme is to improve the lives of children and young people by placing them at the centre of a whole system approach delivered on a district footprint.

8.1.2. The Transformation programme means that Bureaucracy is reduced, and the workforce restructured to deliver services locally, whilst redeveloping central functions and specialisms to enhance the service offer. SEND, early help, social care and education is integrated on a district basis.

8.1.3. Recognised best practice in other authorities has been adopted and the aim is to empower and build resilience in children, families and communities. New staff structures have been outlined, and it was explained how these impacted specifically on children and young people. Leadership has been streamlined and will promote consistency and quality of practice.

8.2. **Safeguarding – Preventing Children coming into Care**

8.2.1. The panel has considered the Safeguarding of children and the prevention of them entering care by considering the various initiatives and processes aimed at keeping children with their families.

8.2.2. Early Help was an intervention/prevention service which sought to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs for individual children and their families to prevent escalation of need. In these cases, referrals often came through the Front Door/First Response; but they could also come from colleagues in Education or even self-referral.

8.2.3. Under the Transformation Programme, the 18 Safeguarding teams have been replaced by eight Districts with a combination of Assessment and Staying Together and Children in Care and Care Leavers which are District based. They continue to work collaboratively with other agencies and professionals to safeguard children, and the team works inclusively and restoratively with a child centred focus.

8.3. **Young Parents**

8.3.1. The panel has been involved in a discussion meeting, focussed on Young Parents, their experiences, the challenges facing them, the support currently available and potential future support. This led to the development of an Action Plan that focusses primarily on the importance of support networks, and preparation for adulthood and parenting in view of the common absence of family role models/mentors.

8.3.2. Issues revolve around identifying suitable, affordable accommodation for young parents, with particular concern at the potential effect of the bedroom tax on a young parent's ability to establish a permanent home.

8.3.3. An additional area highlighted as needing attention was the number of male care leavers who have become young parents, and who might benefit from more support services.

8.4. Care Leavers

8.4.1. Members received two presentations on Care Leavers. The first was from representatives of the Voice Project and Children in Care and Care Leavers Team, and the second was from a Care Leaver.

8.4.2. Officers detailed:

- The Councils statutory role and responsibilities.
- The four categories of Leaving Care status and the Councils' duties to the young; people in each category and their entitlements.
- The Councils statutory obligations in terms of financial support for Care Leavers and the additional optional, local offer.
- Benchmarking statistics against comparable neighbouring Councils.
- An illustrative typical journey for a Care Leaver.
- Challenges facing PAs in providing support for Care Leavers.

8.4.3. The Care Leaver's presentation summarised issues raised at a recent Forum. Due to capacity issues, Leavers experienced difficulty having direct and immediate contact with their PA's, which could sometimes result in a feeling of isolation. The introduction of a hotline to help during a particular 'low point' was suggested.

8.4.4. Whilst members had voiced support for young care leavers, the leavers themselves only had limited awareness of the Corporate Parenting role of members or of how to access their support. Additionally, as members had suggested a wealth of community support was available, accessing that support was a challenge for Care Leavers. The importance of developing the District Champion roles and strengthening links between Care Leavers and their communities was acknowledged. Early community involvement by young people in care, such as volunteering, could help pave the way for community support over the longer term.

9. Service Annual Reports

9.1. Independent Reviewing Officers

9.1.1. Independent Reviewing Officers explained how the service was transitioning to a digital practice and championed Restorative Practice throughout. The service planned to grow children's participation in their looked after reviews and Child Protection Conferences as a priority.

9.1.2. Officers explained how the service had managed through the pandemic. Independent Chairs had responsibility for overseeing Child Protection Conferences, Looked after Review activity, care planning and reviewing arrangements for children looked after by the Local Authority.

9.1.3. The aim is to ensure the Child's Plan remained focussed and relevant, and reflected a child's needs. The Hub model adopted was helping the service manage workload. The service had continued to develop whilst maintaining its focus as championing the voice of the child.

9.2. **Virtual School**

9.2.1. The Virtual School Head Teacher outlined the roles of the team as being responsible for the education of children in our care and for children previously in our care, and to support children who had a social work care plan.

9.2.2. In response to the new responsibilities the virtual team structure has been increased. One member of staff is now allocated to every 70 statutory school aged children. There are 1317 children in care.

9.2.3. The team currently consists of 19 members including the VHT and there is a vacancy for educational psychologist. In addition, there are two practitioners supporting the implantation of the new duties and restorative practice pilot.

9.2.4. The Virtual School is currently focussing on the following five priorities:

- Early years, primary school, high school, and post-16 attendance,
- exclusions and admissions,
- the children's voice,
- evidence informed practice,
- new duties.

10. **Key achievements**

10.1. The Corporate Parenting Panel continues to play a key role in promoting, monitoring and challenging service improvement and achievements.

10.2. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the members have maintained a watching brief, raised concerns and continued to be ambitious about the future of children in our care.

County Councillor Mark Sutton
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel

Implications

1. **Equalities implications:** it will be an ongoing responsibility for the panel to promote, support and respect the identity of children in our care and care leavers.
2. **Legal implications:** There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.
3. **Resource and Value for money implications:** There are no direct financial implications arising from this annual report. Financial performance, namely resources, budget and spend in relation to discharging the panel's responsibilities is regularly reported through the Council's budgetary procedures.
4. **Risk implications:** The key issue facing the panel in its oversight and challenge function is the capacity and financial pressures posed by the increase of the children in our care population on all service areas supporting children in our care, and ensuring that as effective corporate parents, this does not hinder the care, support, aspirations or continued improvement in outcomes for our children in care.
5. **Climate change:** There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.
6. **Health Impact Assessment screening:** There are no health impact assessment implications arising from this report.

Contact Officer

Simon Humble, Governance and Democracy Officer

Telephone: 01785 276961

E-mail: simon.humble@staffordshire.gov.uk

Appendix 1



Corporate Parents Meeting Forward Plan March 2022 – March 2023

Corporate Parenting is the means by which the County Council fulfils its responsibilities as a corporate parent and brings together councillors, senior officers in children's social care and partner agencies.

If you would like to know more about our work programme, please get in touch with Julie Plant, Governance and Support Manager, 01785 276135 or julie.plant@staffordshire.gov.uk or Simon Humble, Governance and Democracy Officer, 01785 276961 or simon.humble@staffordshire.gov.uk

Cycle No	Cycle Topic	Working Group Voice Project	Hot Topic/Discussion Voice Project	Business Meeting Oak Room County Building
1	Understand their past	15 March 22 - 5pm Group 2 (Taken place)	25 April 22 - 4:45pm Group 2 (Taken place)	17 May 22 – 10am All members (Taken place)
2	Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers	11 May 22 - 10am Group 3 (Taken place)	20 June 22 - 4:45pm Group 3 (Taken place)	12 July 22 – 1:30pm All members (Taken place)
-	CPP Induction / refresher training	NA	NA	13 June 22 – 10am All members (Taken place)
3	Delegated Authority	13 July 22 - 5pm Group 1 (Taken place)	19 September 22 - 4:45pm Group 1	18 October 22 - 10am All members
4	TBC	12 October 22 - 5pm Group 2	7 November 22 - 4:45pm Group 2	6 December 22 - 10am All members
5	Future Themes – Planning and Review	NA	Date TBC by Voice Project – no members to attend	14 March 23 - 10am All members

Other activities	Provider	Date and Location
Summer Funday	Voice Project	17 August 22

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
County Members	Gill Burnett Janet Eagland Ann Edgeller Keith Flunder	Richard Ford Peter Kruskonjic Philip Hudson Carolyn Trowbridge Jill Hood	Tom Loughbrough-Rudd Samantha Thompson Victoria Wilson Syed Hussain John Francis
Co-optee Members	Bryan Jones Janice Silvester-Hall Wendy Sutton Alan Hudson	Jenny Barron Michelle Cook Alan Hudson Gillian Heesom	Barbara Hughes Bryan Jones Alan Hudson

Item
Monday 13 th June 2022 – Induction / refresher training - Voice Project/Member and Democratic Services. To include Regulation 44 visit training

Item and lead Officer	Detail	Action/Outcome
Tuesday 12 th July 2022 – 1:30pm		
Children’s Voice Project and Children in Care Council update – Jenny Herbert		
Fostering Service Report – Brian Johnson		
Adoption Service Annual Report – Nicola Hope		
Performance Data – Jenny Herbert		
Work Programme – Simon Humble		

Item and lead Officer	Detail	Action/Outcome
Tuesday 18 th October 2022 – 10:00am		
Children’s Voice Project and Children in Care Council update – Jenny Herbert		
Virtual School Annual Report – Sarah Rivers		
Complaints Annual Report – Kate Bullivant		
Independent Review Officer – Anita Williams / Angela Banks		
Performance Data – Jenny Herbert		
Work Programme – Simon Humble		

Item and lead Officer	Detail	Action/Outcome
Tuesday 6 th December 2022 – 10:00am		
Children’s Voice Project and Children in Care Council update – Jenny Herbert		
Health and Wellbeing of Children in our Care (12-month update) – Hazel Edwards		
Performance Data – Jenny Herbert		
Work Programme – Simon Humble		

Item and lead Officer	Detail	Action/Outcome
Tuesday 14 th March 2023 - 10:00am		
Review of year and Plan of future themes – Jenny Herbert		
Strategy Development – Review & update		
Performance Data – Jenny Herbert		
Work Programme – Simon Humble		

Item and lead Officer	Detail	Action/Outcome
Tuesday XX May 2023 - 10:00am		
Children’s Voice Project and Children in Care Council update – Jenny Herbert		
Corporate Parenting Strategy Development – Review & update		
Corporate Parenting Panel – Annual Report – panel		
Virtual School Update – Sarah Rivers		
Terms of Reference update – Simon Humble		
Performance Data – Jenny Herbert		
Work Programme – Simon Humble		

Appendix 2



Corporate Parenting Panel - Terms of Reference (2022 refresh)

Context

Corporate parenting is the collective responsibility of the Council to prioritise the needs of children in care and seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children. The Corporate Parenting Panel is designed to provide the necessary leadership that drives an ambitious and multi-agency approach to improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers by raising aspirations, building stronger relationships and taking time to listen to the voice of the child.

The panel is a non-political advisory body to the Children's Executive and is chaired by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children and Families. The panel does not take executive decisions but provides leadership and a governance structure for corporate parenting in order to drive forward outcomes for children in our care and care leavers.

Objectives of the panel

- To provide strategic leadership and hold partners to account for performance against strategies to improve all outcomes for children in our care and young people.
- To act as advocates for children in our care and young people and to ensure that the commitments to children in our care and young people set out in the panel's Strategy are delivered.
- To act as champions for corporate parenting influencing other councillors, officers and partners.
- To ensure that children in our care are protected and supported to develop as healthy citizens, able to participate in their community.
- To monitor the effectiveness of the Virtual School in improving the educational attainment of children in our care and young people, to narrow the gap of achievement between them and their peers and to maximise opportunities for training and career placements.

These objectives will be delivered by the panel in the following ways:

- Make sure the whole Council and partner agencies commit to the principles of excellent corporate parenting and to hold partners to account for their role in the delivery of services to children in our care and care leavers.
- Ensure children and young people in care, leaving care and their carers are getting the support they need.

- Lead on the development, review and promotion of the Corporate Parenting Strategy across the Council and involve partners in order to improve services and respond to changing need.
- Be well informed on Government legislation, guidance and policy concerning children and young people in care and receive assurance that the local authority is fulfilling its statutory duties for children in care, leaving care and their carers.
- Ensure a dialogue with the Children in Care Council to enable participation of children in our care and care leavers in the corporate parenting agenda and in influencing service re-design.
- Receive regular reports, as appropriate, on the level and quality of services and scrutinising performance management information to ensure that any shortfalls are properly addressed.
- Attend any training needed to support the role (minimum of two per year).
- In accordance with regulation 44 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 accompanying the independent visitor on their visits to children's homes each month to facilitate communication between children in our care, front line staff and councillors.
- Meet children placed in foster homes and hear from their carers and to monitor the ongoing commitment to providing support, training and clarity of expectations to foster carers to achieve excellent and high-quality care.
- Celebrate the achievements of children in our care and care leavers.
- Link as appropriate with the Safe and Strong Select Committee and develop a relationship with the Safeguarding Children's Board.
- Encourage all partners whether health, education or social care services or the voluntary sector to work in an integrated way in the best interests of children in our care and care leavers.

Membership

The panel shall comprise **15 County Councillors** and may include any member of the County Council representing a county-wide spread and be appointed at the annual meeting of the Council. Representatives from partner organisations may be co-opted onto the panel as appropriate. The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children and Families is chairman of the panel.

Co-opted membership is invited from:

- the eight District/ Borough Councils;
- a foster carer.

The panel will be supported by:

- the Assistant Director - Children's Social Care;
- the Assistant Director - Wellbeing and Partnerships;
- the Head of Children in Care and Care Leavers;
- The Head of Performance, QA & Engagement;
- a Voice Project staff member;
- a representative from commissioning and partnerships;
- one Independent Reviewing Officer;
- a representative from the NHS Integrated Care Board.

Arrangements for Meetings:

The panel shall meet eight times per year as set out below, agree a work programme annually and review it at each meeting. The meetings of the panel are held in private session.

- Four Business meetings – to focus on quality and performance and held in county buildings (all members to attend).
- Four Discussion meetings - these meetings to be held from 4.30pm-6.30pm to discuss priority items identified by young people (panel members will attend on a rota basis).
- Members will attend working focus groups on a rota basis which will focus on outcomes for children and young people and barriers and will feedback to the wider panel.
- Members will be expected to attend a minimum of one engagement activity per quarter to directly hear the views of children, young people or carers (shadowing staff; 1-2-1 meetings with foster carers/families; attending a Voice Project event; or a Foster Carer Support Group).

Meetings of the panel shall be conducted in accordance with the Procedural Standing Orders in Section 11, of the Councils Constitution although meetings may comprise a range of different formats and locations.

The Corporate Parenting Panel will report to the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board as necessary.