

Corporate Parenting

**Report to: Schools, Children and
Families O&S Committee**

14th February 2018

This report covers the broad responsibilities that the council holds along with support from partners in health, schools and the police, to enhance life opportunities for children and young people in our care and for care leavers.

What is Corporate Parenting?

Corporate Parenting is the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, in providing the best possible care and opportunities for the children and young people who are or have been in the care of (looked after by) the council. Corporate parenting is a statutory responsibility as set out in the Children Act 1989.

There are 1869 children in care of Birmingham City Council currently and we work with some 670 care leavers. The main reason for children going into care is abuse or neglect, and the trauma that many of these children and young people suffer can lead to multiple issues in adolescence and in later life. Children who have been in care are more likely to have poor educational outcomes, suffer from mental ill health and are less likely to be in employment, education and training. They are also more likely to be in the criminal justice system, experience homelessness, be pregnant at an early age and struggle with maintaining stable personal relationships. That said, there are many care leavers who have gone on to establish successful careers, bring up their own families and make a positive contribution to their community.

Why is Corporate Parenting important?

It is important for the council, partners, and the city as a whole that we work collectively to guide and support these young people – raising their aspirations and providing training and employment opportunities whilst working together to improve health outcomes. It is our duty to support these young people to become happy, healthy and productive citizens of our city.

Corporate Parenting Initiatives 2016 -18

Mentoring for children in care and care leavers

The Corporate Parent Mentoring Pilot has been recognised by Ofsted as a positive development within the last 18 months.

The 1-2-1 mentoring is a voluntary service that provides immediate, short term and long term support to children in care and care leavers who are at different stages of their pathway be it education, health or transition into independence.

A broader range of Corporate Parenting roles for staff has been developed in the last academic year including supporting taster days and work experience, Raising Aspiration Programme and Going4Success Events.

The mentoring programme has supported staff as part of their own personal development, milestones and goals and demonstrated that everyone has something unique to offer as a Corporate Parent.

We are further developing our mentoring offer working with partners across the City. In October 2017 we agreed to a joint programme Big Heart with Fortem 4Life.

Fortem staff will be trained and provide Life Skills mentoring to young people and adults both on a 1-2-1 basis, working on volunteering projects as a group or donating their volunteering day to provide one off practical support and guidance. Examples include Job searches, CV writing, Cooking, and Decorating. The first cohort of staff will be trained in March 2018.

Residential Children's Homes - Academic Mentoring

The Academic Mentoring pilot was introduced in September 2016 initially working with three residential homes within Birmingham.

Undergraduate student mentors from Birmingham City University have role modelled learning through mentoring in the three pilot homes. Students work in a team led by a Corporate Parent Champion.

The educational offer has also included First Aid training, Duke of Edinburgh Award, The Junior Award Scheme for School, Gateway Drama workshops, sport, 1-2-1 mentoring and Taster Days.

Additional Education and Careers Offer

The Learning Links Programme is the educational offer available to support our young people within, across and beyond their 'home' educational setting/placement.

Arts Link works with a number of partners to provide a range of opportunities across the Arts. The programme offered has included Arts Showcase, drama-based learning in schools, media work/film-making, accredited study and individual music lessons.

The Careers Link programme offers three Career Events per year (one per term) based at an inspirational facility (University, lead employer). There are interactive and immersive workshops to engage and inform young people about pathways into employment. There is a supportive programme for Carers at the event.

The work experience taster day pilot was put in place in April 2017 and to date 76 children in care and care leavers have been offered a taster day experience through an individualised link with a business/employer. They have been allocated a Corporate Parent Mentor who supports them throughout the experience and afterwards, ensuring they are supported in continuing to develop their own education pathway.

The young people who have had a positive and successful experience at a Work Taster can choose to follow a week long Work Experience, again with support from mentors.

Taster Days have given our children in care and care leavers the opportunity to have an insight into wider career prospects, grow in confidence and develop social skills including relationships with other professionals and partners.

Uni Link programme targets Key Stage three young people (11 – 14 years of age) to have a termly event at a university in Birmingham. The events are very interactive and normally run by undergraduate students from the host university.

Rewards and Recognition

One of the key areas of development is the growing support and commitment from our Corporate Parenting Reward Partners.

Reward partners are individuals or organisations within Birmingham and beyond who have committed to supporting children in care and care leavers. This is in a number of ways, including events, career pathways, reward prizes and experience days and bespoke projects.

The support of our Reward Partners working with us has enabled seven Going4Success Education and Aspiration awards and celebration events to go ahead. The events in total have recognised the educational achievements of 740 children in care and care leavers within the last two academic years.

The Going4Success Awards Events have built a tradition for our young people and care leavers, and provide an opportunity to celebrate individual educational milestones with parents, carers, staff and partners coming together.

In total through the work with our Reward Partners 1,919 Reward Prizes or experience days have been received by children in care and care leavers within the last 16 months. We are now continuing to build on the relationships with our partners which will enable us to develop further this area of work in 2018.

The above pilots, programmes and developments have raised the aspirations, expectations and awareness of the educational offer to children in care and care leavers across all of the key stages. All the activities listed continue to make a positive impact and influence the positive educational and aspirational developments of our young people.

A major strength of the programme has been the growing connectivity across Corporate Parent 'services', the partnerships with schools, other educational providers, businesses and Reward Partners in the City.

Physical and Emotional Well Being

The main focus in this area since May 2017 has been to create more opportunities for our young people to take part in physical activities and develop themselves. The opportunities include programmes, taster days, sporting events, live events, and local sessions and supporting the Raising Aspirations Programmes.

Examples include working with sporting organisations such as Edgbaston Foundation, Birmingham City and Aston Villa to develop programmes for our young people to participate in. The programmes are all different and benefit various ages over a period of time.

Since May 2017 24 young people have taken part in a Sport Work Taster day and 118 take part in a Sport taster experience. This links with the relationships built with organisations as we have been given a total of 218 tickets given for live sporting events and activities.

The Primary Going4Success Rewards Event in October 2017 was linked with sport, as we were able to get the partners Aston Villa, Birmingham City, Evolve and West Bromwich Albion to support the event.

Going forward, we have developed with the Wellbeing Service a swimming programme for our young people. This links to a Life Skills programme we are developing with them, City Serve, Barclays and Fortem to provide our young people with skills that will benefit them

going into independent living. We are preparing a Life Skills event for carers and young people to learn about road, food and water safety, with a plan to progress into the summer.

Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum

Supported by the Rights and Participation Service (RAP) we have a thriving Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Care Leavers Forum (CLF). Attendance at the Corporate Parenting Board ensures their voice strongly influences the Corporate Parenting agenda, ensuring it stays grounded and focused on what makes a difference to young people's lives today and can evidence hearing the voice of the child, actually 'listening' to the voice of the child and then responding and feeding directly back. CiCC and CLF have helped raise the corporate parenting profile thorough representing Birmingham City Council at local, regional and national events.

They have won awards recognising their commitment to improving things for their peers, they have presented to international delegates at Tri City events, and they are regularly part of recruitment and selection processes including recent senior posts within the Childrens Trust.

Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board aims to support and champion Birmingham's children in care and care leavers and has a core principle of working with young people talking and listening to them and helping them plan to achieve their aspirations.

The Corporate Parenting Board is a strategic board which meets every three months. The board considers issues for children and young people in care and champions how these issues can be addressed. It oversees the Corporate Parenting Strategy to ensure the responsibilities are fulfilled through delivery of services and the achievement of outcomes for children and young people.

Children's Services through its performance management and quality assurance framework, reports to the Corporate Parenting board. This has given the board the opportunity to concentrate on related targets for our children in care to support universal milestones that none looked after peers would experience such as career pathways and development, transition into independent living, health and wellbeing and mentoring.

Following the September 2017 meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board a Life Skills programme for Children in Care, Care Leavers and Carers is being developed working in partnership with the Wellbeing Service, Barclays, Fortem and City Serve.

Areas in need of improvement

Although much has been achieved there is still much to do. Having now built a firm foundation for Corporate Parenting in the city we need to take things to the next level if we are going to support our children to fully reach their potential.

There are a number of strategic challenges which are in need of focused and sustained intervention to move on:

- 1) A number of children in care continue to be excluded from school or do not have the appropriate hours of education.**

The Virtual School has a 'Vulnerable Pupils' process and this involves reviewing on a weekly basis:

- (a) No School Place (NSP)
- (b) Less Than 25 hours (not offered 25 hours of education)
- (c) NEET
- (d) Attendance/Persistent Absence(PA's)

These figures fluctuate over an academic year. For example in 2016/17

No School Place percentages were reduced over the year from 2.3% (May 16) to 1.4% (May 17). This was due to closer scrutiny by the Senior Management team within education; a sharper focus by the Birmingham Virtual School (BVS) workers to highlight these children as one of the most vulnerable on their class list and work directly with the young person, carer and all professionals to find a solution in a timely manner. Weekly meetings between the BVS Team manager and a Team manager from SENAR have enabled children with more complex needs to be discussed individually and a solution focussed approach to be implemented.

Less Than 25 hours was reduced to 1.5% over the academic year.

NEET's – 14.7%

There were no Permanent Exclusions of Birmingham CiC from Birmingham Schools last academic year.

More is being done with schools to help them further understand the issues connected with children in care and how they can better engage with social workers to ensure CiC receive meaningful education.

2) Although the NEET cohort has reduced this could be reduced further

The care leaver cohort in Birmingham who are NEET is 40%. The Key reasons why there are a higher proportion of 18+are:

- Care leavers who are NEET, 15% are young people with a significant barrier to accessing EET: Parents with children under 2, young people with severe mental health difficulties, illness and SEND.
- End of year 11, age 16 - the number of *children in care* who leave school with 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C (9 – 4) is significantly lower than the general population(In terms of future employment – statistics show that a quarter of young people *without* these **level 2** qualifications will be out of work by their mid -20s).

Thus far the issue of attainment at year 11 has been the main focus for the work of Birmingham Virtual School as the majority of 16+ Children in Care and Care Leavers who continue in education or training do so in Further Education colleges.

At 17, children in care start to prepare themselves for independence. The transition to independence usually involves moving placement – e.g. from foster care to semi-independent, from semi-independent to council tenancy. The challenge of moving

accommodation and taking on the additional responsibility of living independently is the key factor in young people not managing to sustain their further education and going from EET to NEET.

To address this issue links have been made with all of the FE colleges to ensure they are aware of CIC and care leavers who attend the colleges. We ask them to notify the Care Leavers Service if a care leaver's attendance or personal presentation causes concern. Further work needs to be undertaken to strengthen this relationship.

Work based training provision in Birmingham has reduced over the last three years with the closure of a number of work based training providers. Training provision available offers smaller settings where young people are taught in small groups and with more vocational focus. We need more focus within the council and with key partners and businesses to increase Work Based Training provision in Birmingham, and this needs to be aligned with an early notification of opportunities for our children in care and care leavers to allow us time to equip them to be competitive in the open recruitment market.

Apprenticeships have limited viability for care leavers mainly due to the low pay and lack of additional support in the work place. Associated issues such as accommodation and transport costs put additional pressures on care leavers. Further work also needs to take place in developing a range of supportive employers who will pay higher than apprenticeship minimum wage and will offer a flexible and supportive working environment. We have developed close links with the Employment and Skills team who are enabling us to work with a range of supportive employers including M&B, Jacksons, Edgbaston Cricket Ground, Kier construction and Barclays. However we can do much more to address these issues through focused leadership and coordination within the council to improve the Council's offer of supported apprenticeships and other employment opportunities for care leavers along with a more strategic attention to the corporate social responsibility agenda linked to corporate parenting.

3) A fuller commitment from partners to support the recruitment of foster carers is needed to ensure we can continue to deliver the best possible care in a family setting wherever this is appropriate

There is a continued national shortage of foster carers for children and young people – with ongoing demands for increased sufficiency of foster carers. The number of children in care is increasing nationally and the national foster carer profile indicates 10% of foster carers are either retiring or are leaving their roles as foster carers. The fostering network has estimated that England requires to recruit at least 5,900 foster carers in the next 12 months especially carers who can accommodate teenagers and sibling groups.

A National Fostering Stocktake was launched in late April 2017 led by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers. The aim of the Stocktake is to better understand current fostering provision. Core questions will be addressed, such as how children's needs are matched with the skills and knowledge of foster carers, where this works well, and what can be learned from good practice. There are many related issues: factors enabling the effective recruitment and retention of foster carers; how services are organised, particularly the complexity and tensions of local authority and independent foster care providers; and the impact of

commissioning. A report on the findings of the stocktake will be published on GOV.UK in 2018.

The fostering service as part of the Children's Trust will be required to register as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). IFA will require best offers/financial packages to carers and support if we are to be at the forefront of recruiting and retaining more foster carers to meet the sufficiency needs and improved outcomes for the looked after children and young people of Birmingham.

In our marketing and recruitment activity we utilise a number of strategies and activities/campaigns to increase inhouse foster carers. Much of the advertising is now social media-driven, particularly through Facebook. Thirty eight percent of all enquiries are now reported to come through the web (Fostering Network, 2016). However there is still a need for ongoing face to face and community recruitment to meet the demographic and makeup of our looked after children and young people.

To increase this recruitment further we need to make best use of all the things that only the council can offer to its foster carers and make the recruitment of carers for Birmingham children everyone's business.

Foster carer reward incentives for recruiting other new foster carers could be considered to extend to staff and employees of the council. If every person employed by the council could recruit just one foster carer it would undoubtedly meet the sufficiency needs of our Birmingham looked after population. This would also reduce the spend on high cost external IFA and residential placements which would in turn provide much needed savings and spend on high cost placements.

As a Fostering Friendly employer further corporate support could provide incentives to foster carers such as: marketing and advertising in a number of council owned venues – such as libraries, leisure activities and centres, museums, parks etc. – to enable the fostering services to target allocated marketing and recruitment budgets and spend within national and local media, social networks and other corporate and local organisations to be competitive with resource and budgets.

To reintroduce the yearly council house event lead by the Lord Mayor, councillors and senior management would go a long way to help foster carers feel valued.

4) Access to housing and tenancy support for care leavers remains an issue even though this group has priority housing.

In April 2017 the city had 1499 young people 25 and under on the housing list priority scheme. 252 of this cohort were 21 or under, however these figures do not include the young people who presented at the Youth Hub as homeless. Care leavers are confirmed for priority allocation for social housing and yet access to housing and tenancy support remains an issue.

The vision through the Housing Birmingham Partnership is for young people to have access to safe, affordable, suitable permanent housing solutions which meet their needs and aspirations.

However there are a number of barriers to this:

- **Welfare reform** – Homeless Monitor has consistently reported that welfare reforms are contributor to homelessness in England. Changes mean that young people are

the most at risk in terms of being disadvantaged by the housing market. Affordability is a key issue including for young people who will eventually move through the Care Leaver services.

- **Independence Ready** – young people leaving care are not leaving with the necessary skills required or outcomes needed to maintain tenancies. This may include financial management, maintenance, problem-solving, managing shared living, managing a budget, engagement in EET or non-engagement in risky behaviours.
- **Private Landlords** – the above then links to the lack of willingness to take on care leavers and allocate stable and suitable long-term accommodation due to the associated risks. Despite the protected characteristics entitlement for care leavers this leaves some young people with insufficient entitlement to afford single occupancy accommodation.
- **Housing Stock** – the city is facing an acute shortage of all sizes, types and tenures of housing with house building output below the levels required for an efficient and fully functioning housing market.

Once again we are doing a huge amount of work to address these issues:

- Supporting Care leavers to be tenancy ready
- Developing a supportive Care Leavers Pathway
- Currently piloting an LGA funded project that supports a psychologically informed environment (PIE) and delivers mental skills training.
- Employment First Foyer Style Accommodation to support care leavers into education, training and employment.

The homelessness review recognised that in a large and growing city like Birmingham, it is important that we provide young people leaving care with the best opportunities we can, to succeed and live independently without risk of falling into a crisis situation. We need to ensure there is a real drive regarding this agenda if we are to see a significant increase in positive outcomes for young people and better access to safe affordable housing options.

5) **The mental health support for children in care Tier 3 services**

The Birmingham CCGs commissioned a new and innovative 0-25 Mental Health Service to replace CAMHS and remove the service transition point at age 16 to 18 when many major mental health problems are developing for young people. Following a bidding process Forward Thinking Birmingham (FTB) went 'live' in April 2016. The new service was commissioned to cover emotional wellbeing as well as mental health. FTB therefore developed 'Tier 2' services such as the 'Pause Drop-in Centre' and additional services under the umbrella of 'Improved Access to Psychological Therapies' (IAPT).

Specific issues around Tier 3 services for children in care include:

- High thresholds particularly in respect of risk management for young people who are self-harming and those with suicidal ideation.
- Birmingham children placed out of city. The service specification for FTB is to provide services for children placed within 30 miles of Birmingham boundary. This has not been fully implemented by mainstream services.
- For children placed out of city it can be challenging to obtain timely assessments and this has a direct impact on placement decisions.

More high level strategic attention though BCC commissioners need to take place with the new by formed Clinical Commissioning Group to ensure these issues are addressed.

6) Lack of coordinated Community support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

There are multiple challenges facing this cohort of young people. They have usually entered the UK very recently and often arrive with a fear of authority figures.

In the main these young people have either little or no knowledge of the laws and customs they will be faced with on arrival in the UK.

There are few generic support services that have an understanding of UASC, or can access interpreters, meaning that many of the community resources available to other young people are not accessible for UASC. There are some specialist community support groups, however these tend to cover the whole of the Midlands so do not provide intensive or long term services.

To address these issues we require high level discussion with the home office regarding the implications of rushed age assessments at the border and a wider dialogue with community groups and leaders in relation to the support the wider community can offer to this group. More focused discussion need to take place regarding the provision of accommodation (particularly the use of 1 bedroomed properties that are vacant in the city) along with a firmed up approach to Public Health issues.

In addition to the issues requiring strategic intervention as set out above there are also a number of related actions where BCC can make a real difference in the support it offers as a corporate parent.

Corporate Parenting Board

A number of very dedicated elected members and officers have worked extremely hard with the council and partners to ensure agencies meet the corporate parenting expectations. Although the knowledge and expectations of corporate parenting have been raised again there is far more we can do. In order to keep this focus it is proposed that each Directorate has an Assistant director who has lead responsibility for corporate parenting.

This would support in ensuring the council as a whole is fulfilling its corporate parenting responsibilities to children in care and care leavers.

Mentoring

In the last 18 months the mentoring scheme has provided immediate, short term and long term support to children in care and care leavers.

Having that one to one support has proved invaluable for many young people. Raising personal aspirations and offering a wide range of opportunities through mentoring has provided that extra layer of support be it individual goals, education, career pathways, transition into independent living and social skills.

The pilot scheme is now in evaluation stage and is at capacity with a clear identified need to increase the number of trained volunteers that can support our young people and adults.

If the City was able to provide the resource for a corporate parenting volunteer support/ co-ordinator there is great potential to further benefit a larger percentage of children in care, care leavers and those young people on the edge of care.

Birmingham also now has a number of partner organisations that would like to join the mentoring scheme which could have a huge impact on the mentoring support we can offer to our young people.

This could include supporting missing and return interviews, independent visitors and careers. If the pilot was to turn into a programme with further investment the offer could be extended to a further 7 residential homes, increasing the mentoring offer from 21 to 72 young people in 2017/18, support with taster days' work experience, sports and Arts and young people on the Edge of Care.

Rewards and Events

Birmingham would hugely benefit from a City framework for Reward Partners to Children in Care and Care Leavers.

A rewards system and offer alongside this linked to Rewards Partners would make a significant difference to what we can consistently offer our young people. Clear expectations in all commissioning and procurement activity are needed to ensure all contractors as well as additional partners support corporate parenting.

We are in the early stages of introducing a life skills programme for children in care, care leavers and also foster carers and parents. Developing this further would significantly support young people going through the transition into independence.

Introducing a rewards card for young people and adults in partnership with partners and businesses in the City would strengthen this offer.

The Going4Success and Reward Events have made a huge impact in celebrating the educational and aspirational successes and milestones of our children in care and care leavers. Further resource would ensure that these events can not only be maintained but also the opportunity to widen the offer to sporting, rewards and arts events in 2017-18.

Employment Pathways

The council has no current policy that confirms the offer of Taster Days and Work Experience for Children in Care and Care Leavers. Implementing this would make a significant difference in the offer that is available to our young people and adults.

To further enhance the scope and availability of employment, training and apprentice opportunities in the City, consideration could be given to building a requirement in all council contacts that on application children in care and care leavers should be positively considered for at least an interview.

With the number of care leavers having varying degrees of learning needs, who are on the autistic spectrum as well as having emotional well-being needs, the impact of the review of the supporting people funding has the potential to reduce the volume and scope of supporting people funded accommodation linked to employment that is available currently through St Basil's for care leavers.

Physical and Emotional Well Being

The financial challenges facing all young people are significant, but the impact on children in care and care leavers is further accentuated through a lack of a social support network of friends and family.

In this context consideration could be given to offering free bus travel in the City to enhance their social and economic mobility.

To support children in care and care leavers in their physical health with the associated benefits to their emotional well-being, consideration could be given to care leavers having free access to the City's leisure facilities. This could include a number of free classes across the City.

Access to bikes and other sporting equipment for children in care and care leavers would support greatly with physical activity. A review is currently being undertaken to identify what access to bikes and sporting equipment is available to young people.

Many of our children in care and care leavers are unable to swim for a number of reasons. Following the September 2017 meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board an audit is being carried out identifying children in care who are unable to swim 25m or have water safety skills.

Introducing the offer of basic swimming lessons would increase physical activity and more importantly puts safety first.

Supporting Independence

With the ever increasing dependency and reliance on fast speed broadband to undertake every day activity, the City through its procurement strength could explore, negotiate and secure a preferential broadband rate for all care leavers living in and out of the City.

A package that supports all aspects or practical help in decorating and maintaining a property for children in care and care leavers would significantly support the transition into independent living. Reward Partners in the City could play a key part in this offer.

Conclusion

This report has demonstrated a huge amount of development in the corporate parenting agenda, whilst at the same time highlighting substantial gaps. Many of the gaps need strategic attention at a high level in order to identify and implement a set of coherent responses.

The councils corporate leadership team (CLT) considered this report on the 14th December and agreed that the strategic issues be actioned with the support of a lead officers group and progress monitored by CLT, Childrens Trust Board and Scrutiny as part of the Corporate parenting tracking process aligned to the corporate parenting Board.