

ITEM No ...5.....

REPORT TO: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVICES COMMITTEE – 26 OCTOBER 2020

REPORT ON: CORPORATE PARENTING

REPORT BY: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVICE

REPORT NO: 271-2020

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report provides Elected Members with the third and final annual update on the current 3-year Corporate Parenting Plan 2017-2020. It builds on previous reports and outlines continued progress made by the Council and partners in providing a range of supports to care experienced children and young people which is designed to improve outcomes in their health, wellbeing, attainment and post-school destinations. It also outlines how support has been adapted and maintained during the Covid-19 pandemic. As the Independent Care Review was published shortly before the pandemic in February 2020, the report also recommends both a briefing for members and the submission of a further report outlining the next 3-year plan which will include the local response to the review in December 2020.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Committee Members:

- i. note continued progress made in the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Plan 2017-20 and significantly improved outcomes for care experienced children and young people; and
- ii. instruct the Executive Director to coordinate a briefing for members and submit the next 3-year Corporate Parenting Plan in the context of the recommendations of The Independent Care Review in December 2020.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 In previous reports, Article III of the Minute of the Children and Families Services Committee of 29 October 2018 (report no 340-2018 refers) and Article II of the Minute of the Children and Families Services Committee of 28 October 2019 (359-2019 refers) it was noted that the Scottish Government provided an additional £1.2 million to support the implementation of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and to achieve parity of payment for kinship carers and foster carers. It was noted that the implementation of Continuing Care could place significant financial pressure on the Council and this continues to be monitored, with 23 young people currently in Continuing Care compared with 18 last year. This remains manageable within the existing budget and as the Council continues to support young people into Continuing Care, we will monitor trends whilst implementing the range of actions described in this report to help more children and young people remain in stable and settled local family-based homes.

3.2 In addition, the range of actions similarly noted in previous reports to appropriately return some young people to the city from external residential care to local placements and re-integrate them back into the community whilst also reducing costs are continuing. The table below shows the various types of external placement and those young people receiving support. As can be seen, over the last 3 years a downward trend in the number placed externally has been sustained. Whilst the pace of this has been impacted more recently by the pandemic, the Council is continuing to support a further 6 children and young people to return from external placements by 31 March 2021, which would provide suitable local

support and could involve a further reduction in costs of up to £1.4m per annum in future years.

External Placement	31-Mar-17	30-Sep-19	11-Sept-20
Residential Schools	42	31	29
Education Support, Continuing Care and Supported Accommodation	32	31	27
Total Cost	£8.8m	£8.0m	£7.2m

- 3.3 The Scottish Government also continues to award local authorities additional funding in the form of the 'Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund'. For session 2020-21, this is £338,040. This continues to be used to fund 8 Pupil Support Workers deployed across primary and secondary schools to provide extra support to both young people considered to be on the edges of care and care experienced young people, with a particular focus on transitions from primary to secondary school; maintaining school inclusion; assistance to engage with the curriculum; and support into positive destinations. It also funds 2 Health and Wellbeing and Employability Workers for care leavers. As outlined in this report, these posts appear to have contributed towards continued improvements in health, wellbeing and attainment.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In accordance with Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, each Local Authority area has a statutory duty to implement a Corporate Parenting Plan for the Looked After Children and Care Leavers it has responsibility for. The Act lists a range of partners as Corporate Parents and requires them to be pro-active in improving outcomes for care experienced children and young people. Section 58 sets out the key responsibilities and legal duties that every Corporate Parent must fulfil by providing support under the 6 inter-related categories outlined in this report. Parts 10 and 11 of the Act also outline requirements in respect of Aftercare for care leavers up to the age of 26 years and Continuing Care for young people aged 16-21.

- 4.2 In addition, the Council and partners have placed a strong focus on improving support to children and young people who are on the edges of care. This work is described in the separate Committee Report on work with the Hunter Foundation on the What Matters 2 U initiative, alongside aligned work the Addressing Neglect and Enhancing Wellbeing (ANEW) programme; work with the Third Sector on the development of flexible family support; and the development of the Fast-Online Referral Tracking (FORT) system. This is collectively designed to build capacity, confidence and competence to identify and respond to family difficulties across the system; promote easier access to support ranging from practical assistance through to talking therapies; and improve engagement with families in ways which matter to them.

5.0 DEVELOPMENTS

SAFE, SECURE, STABLE AND NURTURING HOMES

- 5.1 Over the 3 years of the current Corporate Parenting Plan, the home environment for children and young people who become Looked After has been increasingly far more settled. This is attributed to higher levels of support, including the development of a culture through effective leadership and workforce development of trauma informed practice in schools and the different placement types of kinship care, foster care and Children's Houses. This is a key factor for care experienced children and young people, who need consistent and stable home environments where, instead of further trauma caused by separation and perceived rejection, they can benefit from enduring positive attachments and relationships with carers. Over the last 12 months, the average length of placements has continued to increase from:

- **At home with parents** - from 15 months to 17 months. Some additional work here has included targeted Third Sector support to identified families who are finding circumstances challenging and expanding this will form a key part of the next 3-year plan.
- **Kinship carers** - from 13 months to 20 months. Some additional work here has included the development of a one-stop-shop kinship carer hub with Tayside Council on Alcohol and although interrupted by the pandemic this will also continue to be progressed.
- **Internal foster carers** - from 15 months to 33 months. Work here has included a targeted training plan and extra support to foster carers. Recruitment activity has been disrupted by the pandemic but we are currently progressing 12 new assessments of potential carers.
- **External foster carers** - from 24 to 59 months. Some additional work here has similarly included additional targeted support to carers and/or children and young people who are presently struggling to promote nurturing environments and/or manage or regulate challenging trauma-related behaviour
- **Children's houses** – from 19 to 21 months. Some additional work here has included an Educational Psychologist working with teams in each house on trauma informed practice. As outlined to the Scrutiny Committee on 24 September 2020, Improvement Plans are addressing Care Inspectorate inspection recommendations.

5.2 Clearly, the stability of internal and external foster care placements in particular has improved markedly. The Council continues to try and increase the recruitment of internal foster carers to both increase the availability of family-based placements and enable careful matching of carers with children and young people, which increases the chances of a placement being successful. Further increases in internal foster carers and the numbers of those who are willing to accept long-term placements and teenagers will likely build on this heightened stability. The even greater improvement in the stability of external foster care placements is attributed to more of those placements being available for teenagers in particular, alongside more of those carers being in a position to support children and young people on a longer-term basis. It should be noted that placements also often end on a deliberate, planned basis.

To this end and in relation to all types of placement, in May 2019 the Council and 2 other local authorities started to work with the Centre of Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS) on a permanence improvement program. Using recognised improvement methodologies, the aim of this PACE initiative is to improve care planning processes and ensure that once children and young people do enter the formal care system, they return home or become settled in their forever placement as soon as appropriate, including through adoption. Early indications show a significant impact with a 100% improvement in meeting the timescale for the initial stages of assessment and planning for a child's future care in the test area. The PACE team will continue this work into 2020-21 and scale the approach across all relevant teams.

6.0 EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

6.1 There has continued to be a considerable amount of joint activity to help increase support to care experienced children and young people in school and improve their attendance, inclusion, attainment and entry into positive destinations. This includes the development of a LAC Charter outlining shared practice principles between Head Teachers and Social Work Teams; a new Inclusion Policy which encourages additional joint support to pupils at risk of school exclusion; the implementation of the Breakthrough Mentoring scheme in all 8 secondary schools and Offsite Education; and support from the designated Pupil Support Workers. This appears to be contributing towards some key improvements over the last 3 years, whilst also confirming that this must remain a key Council priority:

- **School exclusion** - in 2016-17 there were 202 exclusion incidents per 1,000 LAC pupils excluded whereas in 2019-20, this had declined markedly to 54 per 1,000 LAC pupils.

- **Attendance** - remains the same for consecutive sessions as in both 2018-19 and 2019-20 it was 87.5% compared with 91.7% for all pupils.
- **Attainment** – in session 2017-18 only 19.5% of Looked After pupils in S5 gained SCQF Level 5 in Literacy and Numeracy compared to a marked increase to 27% in 2018-19.
- **Positive destinations** - in session 2017-18, 86.7% Looked After school leavers entered a positive destination compared with a slight increase to 87.5% in 2018-19

6.2 To date, the Breakthrough Mentoring Scheme has worked with over 400 pupils considered to be on the edges of care or currently in care and feedback from both Head Teachers and children and young people has been positive. The team of 8 Pupil Support Workers have also been working with pupils to encourage attendance and engagement. This includes supported transition from P7 to S1, sessions aimed at improving self-esteem, acting as a 'Buddy' in Team Around the Child and Child Protection Case Conference meetings, facilitating the formation of secondary school Champions' Boards and encouraging care experienced secondary pupils to engage with the Young Persons Participation Group. The service is currently exploring how the mentoring scheme and the Pupil Support Workers can align and strengthen.

6.3 In relation to training and employment, a designated Care Leavers Employability worker is now linked with all secondary schools to enable early identification of and support to care experienced leavers who are likely to find the transition particularly challenging. The worker coordinates or directly provides wrap-around support as the young person moves out of school towards further education, apprenticeships or employment. In the last year, the worker has supported 55 young people towards a sustained positive destination. The approach has contributed towards 53% moving into positive destinations over the last 12 months, with ongoing support provided to others.

6.4 The number of care experienced young people currently receiving support from the Throughcare and Aftercare Team in further education or training continues to rise. As at 1 October 2020 there are 96 young people in Higher or Further Education and training. The team works closely with Dundee and Angus College and this contributed towards the college being the top performing in Scotland for care experienced learners last year, with a 68% completion rate against a national average of 58.7%. To help sustain the impact of this and related support, the Council guaranteed interview scheme for care experienced young people who meet the essential criteria in person specifications also remains in place. Under this scheme, 18 care experienced applicants actively applied for posts in the last 12 months.

7.0 **PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH**

7.1 In accordance with the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) framework of proportionate and holistic support, a range of services to support the physical and mental health of children and young people have also been developed over the last 12 months, including with a particular focus on Looked After Children and Care Leavers. To help raise confidence, capacity and competence in universal services to quickly recognise and address concerns about general mental wellbeing, the Tayside Regional Improvement Collaborative launched an Emotional Health and Wellbeing for Children and Young People Toolkit. In schools, counsellors are being recruited as part of a continuum of resilience-based support. A digital mental health service, 'Together Well', will be launched across Tayside for 16 to 19-year olds. In the Throughcare and Aftercare Team, a Health and Wellbeing Worker is focusing on:

- Supporting other workers in the team to identify and address unmet health and wellbeing needs
- 1:1 and group support covering a range of themes, including self-esteem and healthy lifestyles
- A partnership with Fare-share to make foodstuffs and ensure sexual health products and sanitary products are readily available
- Monthly drop-in sessions to access support from a range of services, including The Corner, Web Project, LAC Nurses, Oral Health and Penumbra

7.2 For children and young people with more acute mental health problems potentially requiring psychiatric and/or other specialist intervention, the Council is also working with NHS Tayside Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to help improve systems and support. This targeted service has been supported by Health Improvement Scotland to develop an action plan to deliver the standard that 90% of children and young people referred for assessment should be seen within 18 weeks with key milestones towards the target over the next two years. Whilst efforts are made to provide support from universal, Third Sector and/or Social Work services and prevent mental wellbeing concerns from escalating, the Council continues to work jointly with CAMHS to provide consistent support to some care experienced children and young people.

8.0 YOUTH AND COMMUNITY JUSTICE

8.1 In order to reduce the number of young people entering the youth and criminal justice systems, the Council continues to work with key partners on the continued adherence to the Whole System Approach. This seeks to provide young people with age appropriate proportionate support and avoid or delay their entry into formal legal processes. As such, there has been a further increase in the number of young people aged 16-17 years referred by the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) for Diversion from Prosecution schemes. It avoids them obtaining a criminal record which can hamper employment prospects whilst at the same time ensuring that any relevant needs can be timeously addressed. Over the 3-year period of the Corporate Parenting Plan, the numbers diverted have been:

- **2017-18** - 7
- **2018-19** - 29
- **2019-20** – 31
- **2020-21** - 42 (projected)

8.2 Whilst it should be noted that not all of these young people are care experienced, most have additional support needs, many are already known to the Children's Service and the diversionary support has been provided by Locality Adolescent Teams. Further into the formal welfare and/or justice systems, the number of young people placed in secure care as a result of concerns about the risks they present to others, from others and/or to themselves has reduced from 304 nights in 2017-18 to 86 nights so far in 2020-21. The number of children and young people aged 16-20 years receiving a custodial sentence has reduced from 19 in 2017-18 to 10 in 2019-20. These are significant achievements and reflect a partnership commitment to ensuring that, wherever possible, all young people are supported their local community, including those with complex and multiple needs.

9.0 PROMOTE THE RIGHTS OF CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND VALUE CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUALS

9.1 Over the last 12 months, the Council has continued to support Looked After Children to express and record their views when developing and reviewing Child's Plans. In the last 12 months, 75% recorded their views, with some either not expressing a view and/or it not being recorded. Over the next 12 months, a key priority is now to both increase the proportion of recorded views and collate and analyse the information to inform how we continue to improve support. In order to extend the principles of the Champions Board and effectively engage with and actively listen to a broader number of care experienced children and young people in accordance with their age and stage of development, a partnership engagement team, consisting of representatives from Health, Schools, Social Work and the Third Sector, is also being established.

9.2 The Council also both pro-actively offers advocacy support through an independent advocacy service commissioned from Who Cares? Scotland. In the last year, advocates supported a total of 52 young people, 35 of whom had not received advocacy services before. In doing so, advocates worked alongside children and young people on 242 individual advocacy issues. The advocates also provide group-based support to all young people in the 5 Dundee

Children's Houses as well as external residential placements, where they are encouraged to speak openly about their needs and the extent to which they believe they are being met. A key priority over the next 12 months is to work with Who Cares? Scotland to measure the impact of this support.

10.0 COVID 19

10.1 During the pandemic, the Children and Families Service worked with partners on a variety of adapted models of service delivery in order to maintain support to both children and young people on the edges of care and those who are currently Looked After or Care Leavers. This included work to set-up 8 Community Support Centres and Rockwell School for more vulnerable children and young people; new Minimum Practice Requirements for Social Work teams to use risk ratings to inform whether families should be seen on a face-to-face basis either weekly, fortnightly or monthly; delivering school work and food parcels; and providing a range of therapeutic, practical and financial support, including as an alternative to respite for families with children with disabilities. In this context, some key achievements included:

- **Community Support Centres** - the average daily attendance for vulnerable pupils at a Community Support Centre was 137 and a total of 404 vulnerable pupils attended a CSC at some point during lockdown
- **Child Protection Register and Care Leavers** - 100% of children and young people on the CPR and over 80% of Care Leavers were supported on a face-to-face basis at least fortnightly, well above the national averages
- **Other vulnerable families** - out of a total of around 1,200 other vulnerable families receiving Social Work support, 40% were supported on a face-to-face basis at least fortnightly and 60% at least monthly, alongside other support.
- **Financial support** – using the Fast Online Referral Tracking (FORT) system as a referral mechanism, 53 agencies made applications to the Wellbeing Fund and over £148,000 was distributed to 473 families
- **Hidden harm** – in addition to awareness raising campaigns, partners were routinely involved in information sharing on potential perpetrators and victims of harm, including domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health

10.2 This joint work is very likely to have contributed towards the number of Child Protection referrals to the Multi Agency Screening Hub (MASH); the numbers of children and young people newly placed on the Child Protection Register; the number of emergency Child Protection Orders; and the numbers of newly Looked After children and young people all being broadly comparable to the equivalent period last year. It supported families to cope through the pandemic, reduced the risk of significant harm to children and young people and prevented a higher number of children entering care. Currently, there are just over 500 Looked After Children in the city, similar with last year. As we move through recovery, the service also continues to work with the Children's Reporter on ensuring appropriate oversight of legal arrangements. Examples of the range of support to families has included:

- ✓ **Foster carers who were shielding** - support to permanent foster carers who were shielding with a family of 3 care experienced young people aged 12, 17 and 21 years. The team carried out frequent video calls with the family; supported the older young person into her own tenancy when we came out of lockdown; and supported the youngest into respite support with the carer's daughter, from where she spent time with her friends and returned to school. The carers are no longer shielding and they are now fully caring again for the 2 youngest, whilst providing continued support to the older young person who is moving towards independence.
- ✓ **A boy who had been in foster care for just over 3 months** – support to a temporary placement where, at the point of lockdown, the team were progressing a rehabilitation plan to enable reunification of the child with his mum. He had a strong bond with both of his parents and benefitted from regular contact. As his Dad worked full time, contact was facilitated via Facetime at weekends. His Mum also called for short periods on a daily basis and read him bedtime stories in the evenings, which

helped him to settle. When the lockdown period ended, the team coordinated face-to-face contact in a manner that was safe for the child, parents and foster carers.

- ✓ **A boy with a history of considerable trauma in his early years** – support to a foster carer and a care experienced child who had been together for 2 years. As a result of considerable trauma in his early years, the child had been receiving specialist emotional and mental health support before the lockdown. To maintain this, psychotherapy sessions were adapted to be carried out over Skype in the presence of the carer. The carer also benefited from the input of the psychotherapist by gaining a broader understanding of the young person's needs and how she might adjust her own support both during and after lockdown.
- ✓ **A girl on the Child Protection Register with a history of self-harm and her Dad with physical and mental health needs** – support included visits to the family at home at least every week, alongside additional weekly and sometimes daily communication with the girl using Whatsapp. Particular attention was given to her potentially difficult transition from primary to secondary school, involving close communication between the team and both schools and reassurance to her and her Dad. When her Dad was admitted to hospital, the team facilitated temporary support from alternative carers.
- ✓ **A care leaver with mental health problems** – support to a young person who struggled with isolation and lack of routine, which was leading to deteriorating mental health. The team prioritised harm-reduction and mental health support through socially-distanced walks; provided regular telephone and Facebook contact in the evenings and weekends; and developed a consistent approach with supported accommodation staff. In response, his mental health has improved, his substance use significantly reduced and his relationships developed positively. He now has a place at Dundee and Angus College and is moving into a Council tenancy.

11.0 INDEPENDENT CARE REVIEW

11.1 As noted, the Independent Care Review was published just before the pandemic in February 2020. Work to develop a new Corporate Parenting Plan, or a plan for and with care experienced children and young people informed by the findings of the review, has therefore been delayed. However, The Promise outlined 5 foundations which it stated must be at the heart of a re-organisation of how the country thinks, plans and prioritises for children and their families. A key principle running through each foundation is the importance of meaningful, respectful and nurturing relationships, both between professionals and families and within families themselves. Locally, it can be seen the foundations resonate with approaches being adopted over the last 3 years, whilst confirming that the Council and partners need to accelerate, including by consolidating successful approaches adopted during the pandemic:

- **Voice** – children must be listened to and involved in decision making, which reflects the approach towards children on the edges of care in the WM2U and ANEW programmes and towards care experienced children through trauma informed practice, participation, engagement and advocacy.
- **Family** – where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay and families must be given support to nurture that love and overcome difficulties which get in the way. This also reflects local approaches towards easier access to flexible family support through FORT and partner services
- **Care** – where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where it is safe to do so and belong to a loving home for as long as needed. This similarly reflects the local approach towards support to both kinship carers and foster carers and the PACE initiative
- **People** – people that we actively care for must be supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community, who in turn must be supported to listen and be compassionate. Mirroring work to extend the Champions Board and provide training and employment opportunities

- **Scaffolding** – children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when it is needed. The local approaches adopted both before and during the pandemic, involving 365 schools, CSCs, FORT and targeted support explicitly informed by assessments of risk, must be scaled.

12.0 SUMMARY

- 12.1 Over the last 3 years, the Council has worked with partners to implement a broad range of measures designed to improve outcomes for care experienced children and young people. This report illustrates a clear sense of direction; shows measures are having a positive effect including during the pandemic; and confirms that in many ways the approach mirrors the findings of the Independent Care Review. The next iteration of the plan will outline how we now build on this in greater detail and depth, including in relation to improving support to children and young people considered to be on the edges of care. Our aim is to provide meaningful support which safely avoids children and young people from entering the care system; ensures that they remain settled with their own or another forever family quickly and appropriately; and meets all health, wellbeing and educational needs into adulthood.

13.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 This Report has been subject to an assessment of any impact on equality and diversity, fairness, poverty, environment and corporate risk. There are no major issues.

14.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 14.1 The Council Management Team have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

15.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 15.1 None.

Paul Clancy
Executive Director

October 2020

Glyn Lloyd
Acting Head of Service
Children's and Community Justice Services