

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **20th January 2022**
Report Subject: **Corporate Parenting Progress Report 2021-22**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr J. Mason, Executive Member Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Ceri Bird – Service Manager, Children’s Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
Y		10.01.22			20.01.22	02.03.22		

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the progress made by Blaenau Gwent Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) throughout 2021 to improve outcomes and services for our Children Looked After (CLA).

2. Scope and Background

2.1 This report will focus on key achievements and progress made throughout 2021 to date on the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) Action Plan 2020/21.

Great progress has been made on actions contained within the plan but there is still the last quarter of the year still to be added before the final action plan is completed in March 2022.

The Corporate Parenting Action Plan 2020/2021 was once again developed in line with the 7 Definitions of Well-being under Section 2 of Part 1 of the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014, plus one additional outcome that was decided upon at a local level. For the purpose of the action plan the 7 Definitions of Well-being (plus the extra priority) have become key priorities under which fall measurable actions and outcomes thus ensuring we are addressing and monitoring all elements of our looked after children’s well-being:-

- All our Children Looked After enjoy good physical and mental health, and emotional wellbeing;
- All our Children Looked After are protected from abuse and neglect;
- All our Children Looked After are encouraged to reach their full potential in education, training and recreation;
- Our Children Looked After have healthy domestic, family and personal relationships;
- Our Children Looked After secure their rights and entitlements;
- Our Children Looked After enjoy social and economic well-being;
- Our Children Looked After live in suitable accommodation;
- The Corporate Parenting Agenda is owned across the local authority and by partner agencies.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 It is recommended that Committee Members:-

Option 1 Acknowledge progress made throughout 2021 and feel confident that the Local Authority and its partners are doing well to improve outcomes for our looked after children as part of our corporate parenting responsibilities.

Option 2 Acknowledge progress made throughout 2021 and the exemplar practice delivered by officers throughout the Covid 19 pandemic to ensure all our children looked after are supported and to suggest activities or areas for development that the Local Authority might adopt to improve the outcomes of children looked after as part of our corporate parenting responsibilities.

4. Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

It is not anticipated there will be any financial costs associated in taking forward this Corporate Parenting Action Plan, the plan is about new ways of working together to deliver outcomes.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There are many risks if, as corporate parents we do not strive to support our children looked after adequately improve their outcomes. We must endeavour to support our individual children looked after to help them overcome the adversity they have already faced in life to enable them to become resilient adults.

5.3 ***Legal***

No legal implications.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

It is not anticipated that there will be any staffing / workforce development implications other than robust collaboration between departments.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Update on Progress made under the Action Plan

The full Corporate Parenting Board Action Plan 2021/22 is attached to this report as *Appendix 1* and more detailed commentary is included next to the relevant sections.

For the purpose of this year's report, I will address each key priority in turn and pick out some key outcomes, providing a summary of what progress has been made, spotlighting some headline activities of interest to focus on.

6.2 **Key Priority 1 - All our Children Looked After enjoy good physical and mental health, and emotional well-being**

The CLA Health Team across Gwent has made great progress in adapting to the changes in line with Public Health and Government recommendations as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of Microsoft Teams and What's App video calls enabled the ongoing engagement with children and young people allowing the completion of their statutory health assessments and allowing them to take part in meetings. Since September 2021 assessments have been face to face contact in full PPE with weekly clinics at Blaina ICC resuming from 27.09.21.

A new action for 2021 was for the Placement Team to receive Attachment training, which will then be delivered via a variety of methods to foster carers to enable them to support children who are experiencing attachment and trauma based problems. The training has been received by the team and will be rolled out in the New Year to foster carers.

6.3 **Key Priority 2 - All our Children Looked After are protected from abuse and neglect**

For 21/22 a priority was agreed to support those children where exploitation is a feature using the newly adopted Child Exploitation Measurement Tool (CEMT). The CEMT tool kit has been adopted across Gwent and has been built onto WCCIS. Officers have ensured all relevant professionals will be invited to Child Exploitation meetings and are currently finalising the prompt indicators. All team training has been completed and will be delivered wider in the departmental Monday training sessions periodically for new staff. Review of the effectiveness of the new tool will be carried out later in the year 2022.

6.4 **Key Priority 3 - All our Children Looked After are enabled to reach their full potential in education, training and employment (ETE)**

This is such a large priority area Appendix 2, 3 and 4 contains a full breakdown of attainment, exclusions and destinations of our children looked after and care leavers. A new subgroup was formed in 2019 which had 3-4 key actions and is now led by the Education Directorate.

There are 3 Key Actions for 21/22: -

Action 1 – Support our Children Looked After in their learning throughout the Covid 19 pandemic and into the recovery phase.

Action 2 – Promote “Children Looked After Friendly Schools”

Action 3 – Ensure we are ready for ALN Act launch September 2021 to ensure our Children Looked After have the right support.

- At the end of academic year 2020-2021, 154 children of statutory school age were looked after by Blaenau Gwent local authority. The majority of children who are looked after by Blaenau Gwent continue to be educated within Blaenau Gwent and attend mainstream schools. A small proportion of our children looked after attend more specialist education settings.
- Almost half (49%) of all statutory school aged children who were looked after by Blaenau Gwent had additional learning needs sufficient for intervention at School Action, School Action Plus or Statement level. This is slightly less when compared with the previous academic year when the figure was 52%.
- In total, 21% of children looked after by Blaenau Gwent at the end of academic year 2020-2021 had a Statement of Special Educational Needs. This figure is a slight increase when compared with the previous academic year.
- A total of 5 children looked after (3%) experienced at least one or more non-transitional school moves during 2020-2021. This is a decrease when compared with the previous academic year when the figure was 16 children (10%). Consistency of schooling continues to be considered as part of the matching process when a child looked after moves placement and transport is provided where necessary to ensure stability of schooling. When a child does have to move school, processes are in place to ensure that delays in admissions are avoided, wherever possible.
- No child looked after by Blaenau Gwent was permanently excluded from school during academic year 2020-2021. Incidents of exclusions issued in respect of children looked after has remained in line with the previous year. The number of individual children looked after who have received fixed term exclusions during the year has increased however the total number of days lost to exclusions has decreased when compared with the previous year.
- The academic progress and attainment of our children looked after continues to be monitored by the CLA education team. In 2020-2021 end of Key Stage 4 assessment arrangements were changed due to COVID and centre determined grades were awarded to learners.
- In 2020-2021, 19 children looked after completed their statutory studies. All but one of the children in this cohort achieved recognised qualifications. The one learner who did not achieve recognised qualifications has since completed and submitted work with outcomes expected in Spring 2022.
- 9 of our children looked after who completed their statutory studies in 2020-2021 had additional learning needs and 4 had a statement of special educational needs.

- 14 of the 19 children attended mainstream school settings. One child attended an independent school setting outside the Local Authority area, three attended local authority maintained special school settings for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and one child was educated at a school based alternative setting.
- Almost all learners are engaged in post 16 educational and/ or training opportunities.
- This year, after being cancelled last year, the Annual Achievement Award for Children Looked After was incorporated with the Winter Wonderland Event held on 1st December 2021. The annual event recognises the many educational successes of our CLA through the continued period of Covid disruption.
- A significant number of our children looked after, 113 in total, were recognised for their achievements both within school and in terms of their participation in extra-curricular activities. Schools both within the local authority and neighbouring authorities nominate our children looked after with further nominations being made by independent and special school settings.
- The ALN Act launch date has been delayed till January 2022 but the Department is almost ready for the Go Live date.
- The Authorities Corporate Training Scheme for care leavers goes from strength to strength. The officer responsible for the scheme is employed through the Aspire programme funded from the CCG Legacy funding until March 2022. The brochure has been redeveloped and the programmes on offer broadened to capture all young people. The programme supports all care leavers up to age 25 years. A brochure of external opportunities will also be completed in 21/22. Young people are supported to find a placement externally if there is nothing suitable available internally.

7 young people are engaged at the moment.

- 2 young people that are over 19 years of age are on placement.
- 1 trainee is with Catering and Hospitality
- 1 trainee is with Child care
- 1 trainee is with Adult care
- 1 trainee is with Grounds Maintenance.
- A 21-year-old university student on the corporate traineeship had help with their CV and is now working with an external provider for past 5 months.

6.5 **Key Priority 4 - Our Children Looked After have healthy domestic, family and personal relationships**

- A Task and Finish Group was established to promote healthy and safe relationships and children's health and wellbeing from an early age and at all stages of their life early in 2020. The group was initially established with a range of professionals from early year's, school, college and youth service but the group meetings were put on hold as other priorities superseded this to ensure existing service delivery continued throughout the pandemic. Despite this 14+ Team have developed a Care Leaver forum which will seek to address a range of topics concerning our CLA and care leavers. Initially this has focused on CLA friendly language and will now move to planning St David's expenditure for next financial year, then developing a PA service and entitlement leaflet.
- The Beaufort Road upgrade is now complete and the kitchen has been used throughout the summer and the garden used for growing and BBQ's. Crisis facilities are available in the bathroom and kitchen. A Harvest festival was held using the food the children had grown from the planters.
- New equipment (lively colour chairs, bikes and play equipment, books and games) was purchased for the rooms and outdoors. Further work is needed outdoors for a trampoline and a shed for storage.
- Formal approval was given and the Contact Team are now called "Family Time Team". Ongoing work continues to change the language in the forms used within statutory services for children looked after.

6.6 **Key Priority 5 Our Children Looked After secure their rights and entitlements**

Implementation of the new Care and Support Plan which is outcome focused and much more friendly to use and understand by our children looked after is now complete and about to be used and available on WCCIS.

A Blaenau Gwent easy to read brochure detailing children's rights, entitlements and assistance available is almost complete this will include bespoke local information relevant to our care leavers and will be signed off in January 2022.

6.7 **Key Priority 6 - Our Children Looked After enjoy social and economic wellbeing**

Regional Fostering Framework coordinators mapping exercise of all opportunities for leisure and community activities is now completed the next stage will be to work on a local exercise.

The take up of social events and activities has taken a downward spiral through the pandemic, there seems little appetite from our children looked after but we do aim to prioritise this in the next action plan 22/23.

6.8 **Key Priority 7 - Our Children Looked After live in suitable accommodation**

This key priority continues to go from strength to strength delivering new outcomes and opportunities for our children each year; -

- The Accommodation Audit is updated each January and care leavers identified for the ensuing year. Meetings are then held with RSL's to inform them where accommodation will be required that year.
- A new Supported Lodgings advertising and promotion scheme has now been developed and is run by Llamau and funded by the Housing Support Grant. There have been 3 new supported lodging providers recruited by the Authority in a short time along with this another is on hold and waiting to be approved. Recruitment is still happening and regular meetings with Llamau happening. HSG has dedicated a floating support service within Llamau who have recruited a male and female support worker.
- The Creation of more 1 bedroom flats for care leavers in the Authority continues to be a problem with few RSL's interested in developing this type of accommodation. Meetings with Housing and various RSL's have been held to take this forward and now additional funding has been made available in the housing strategy.
- Move on panel has been hugely successful since revised 18 months ago with a lot of young people accessing accommodation and doing well with the assistance from the Registered Social Landlord, Supporting People and Housing Options.
- The Implementation of "Foster Wales" campaign at local/regional level in order to recruit more foster carers for the local authority went live in July 2021. Since then we had one successful campaign which led to an increase in fostering enquiries in Blaenau Gwent. We have had ongoing enquiries and assessments due to be presented to the Panel for new approvals. Since April 2021 we have had 4 new generic fostering households approved by the panel and available to accept placements. The website is <https://fosterwales.blaenau->

gwent.gov.uk. Blaenau Gwent core offer for foster carers is now in line with regional and national offer.

6.9 **Key Priority 8 - The Corporate Parenting Agenda is owned across the local authority and by partner agencies.**

The Corporate Parenting Board continues to have good commitment from Local Authority officers and partner agencies and once again this year Elected Member representation has been excellent and fruitful.

Also this is the eighth annual report on Corporate Parenting delivered to Scrutiny Committee.

6.10 **Exemplary Practice throughout COVID**

It should be recognised that in addition to statutory service delivery and the delivery of the actions in the 21/22 action plan, due to the COVID 19 pandemic there has been a significant amount of additional work undertaken by all officers and partners to improve outcomes and maintain the safety of our children looked after, some examples although by no means exhaustive include; -

- Children's Christmas appeal gets larger each year with 400 children supported this year some of whom are looked after
- Weekly welfare calls switching from telephone to video chat
- Delivery of support groups online
- Innovative wellbeing support packs to help with relaxation and anxiety
- Drop and go food parcels, grants / money, fuel tokens, isolation tips and tricks for home activities.
- Laptops for digitally excluded learners
- Bespoke closed access Facebook pages set up
- Virtual meetings to complete statutory health assessments
- Virtual direct work
- Online learning platforms
- Transition support
- Continuing to recognise CLA achievements
- ICT support for young people
- Weekly Safeguarding bulletins
- Access to education hub provision for all CLA
- New pathway of support for early Years CLA in childcare hubs
- Training needs of foster cares identified and support with IT skills
- Adopting new ways of support
- Mentors available for online learning
- Santa online on Facebook with personalised messages for our children

7. ***Expected outcome for the public***

Better services for Children Looked After.

8. ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
The Blaenau Gwent Corporate Parenting Board is made up of elected members, Local Authority officers and representation from partner agencies to ensure that the best possible advice, care and safeguarding of our children is ensured across the 7 areas.
- 8.1 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
Research shows that children and young people who have experienced care or who are looked after have the poorest outcomes of all children and young people in the UK. The Corporate Parenting concept exists to try and improve outcomes for our children and young people for the long-term and improve the level of respect and support from people for the rights of care leavers and children looked after.
- 8.2 ***Preventative focus***
By adopting the 7 ways of working from the SS&WB act into a Corporate Parenting Action Plan we will ensure the needs of our children looked after are met on all levels to ensure problems do not escalate, become more acute, and more costly, to the detriment to the children, families, carers and the community in the future.
- 8.3 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
The role of the Corporate Parent falls across all the different Departments of the Authority and external services, to ensure its legal responsibility for enabling children to lead happy and fulfilling lives is fulfilled. It is only by working collaboratively we can ensure this.
- 8.4 ***Integration (across service areas)***
The Corporate Parenting Action Plan is set across the 7 Definitions of Wellbeing under Section 2 of part 1 of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014/. This approach will ensure there is integration between all services in the vision to improve outcomes for Looked After children in Blaenau Gwent.
- 8.5 ***EqIA(screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***
Not required.
9. ***Monitoring Arrangements***
The Corporate Parenting Board has been re-established for over 3 years. The work undertaken and scrutinised by members of this board are already evidencing improvements in certain areas of looked after children's lives. The challenge for the group is to continually identify actions which will make a positive difference to the day-day lives and outcomes for our looked after children.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1
- Appendix 2
- Appendix 3
- Appendix 4