

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **21st January 2021**
Report Subject: **Corporate Parenting Progress Report 2020-21**
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)
	07.01.21	06.01.21			21.01.21	24.02.21		

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 2020 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 2020 to date on the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) Action Plan 2020/21.

2.2 Please note the action plan for this year was developed in February 2020, prior to the Covid 19 Pandemic which has determined how we have prioritised and delivered services for our Children Looked After in 2020. Much of the action plan has been delivered and there is still the last quarter of the year still to be added before the final action plan is completed, however there is an additional section in this year’s report detailing the exemplar practice and service delivery undertaken by officers in response to the pandemic to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our children looked after.

2.3 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 children looked after 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 enabled 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 2020, and feel confident that the Local Authority and its partners are doing well to improve outcomes for our children looked after as part of our corporate parenting responsibilities.

Option 2 Acknowledge progress made throughout 2020, and the exemplar practice delivered by officers throughout the Covid 19 pandemic to ensure all our children looked after are supported, and 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 2020/21 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, each key priority will be addressed in turn and some key outcomes highlighted, 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 call 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. The Statutory Health Assessments were amended and updated alongside the other CLA Nursing Teams Assessments across Wales in June 2020.

MyST (My Support Team) has been in operation since June 2019, and continued their work at the same level as prior to Covid 19 and facilitated the step down of children looked after from residential care into foster care and prevented children from entering residential care.

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

For 2019/20 and 20/21 the Board identified an action to identify our children looked after who were at risk of exploitation, where that was criminal exploitation or sexual exploitation. Once identified the board wanted to be assured that interventions were being delivered to reduce that risk.

An audit was concluded in October 2020 and findings were reported to the Corporate Parenting Board in December 2020 which showed that between January 2019 and September 2020 **14** children had been identified as being at risk of exploitation.

10 children were deemed at risk Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) = **9** children were female and **1** child was male.

3 children were believed to be at risk of 'Missing' = **1** was female and **2** were male.

1 child was deemed at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE).

The audit concluded that the social work teams involved had recognized exploitation risks and were effectively working with the children to help reduce these risks by holding regular risk assessment meetings to monitor and review the potential risks of exploitation. Additionally, Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings are held on a quarterly basis. The purpose of these meetings is to provide oversight of Child Exploitation (CE) cases, sharing of intelligence on linked cases and locations of concern; and provide oversight of case escalations. The meetings, also, consider operational and tactical issues in relation to sexual and criminal exploitation plus children missing from home.

6.4 **Key Priority 3 - All our Children Looked After are enabled to reach their full potential in education, training and recreation (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 4 key actions and is now led by the Education Directorate.

There are 4 Key Actions :-

Action 1 - Minimise the risk of Children Looked After becoming Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET).

Action 2– Improve communication with the Education Achievement Service (EAS) regarding CLA funding and cluster plans (CLA Pupil Deprivation Grant)

Action 3 – Promote “Children Looked After Friendly Schools”

Action 4 – Ensure we are ready for ALN Act to ensure our Children Looked After have the right support.

- At the end of academic year 2019-2020, **162** 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 looked after children attend more specialist education settings.
- Just over half of our children looked after have additional learning needs and 20% have a statement of special educational needs.
- There has been a decrease in the incidents of exclusions issued in respect of children looked after as well as the number of individual children who have received fixed term exclusions and the total number of days lost to exclusions when compared with the previous year. However, it is important to note that for 2019-2020, the time period for exclusions covers September to March 2020 only.

- In response to COVID 19, the Welsh Government has cancelled all statutory data collections that would have been due to take place in Summer 2020 - the School Performance Information (Wales) Regulations 2011 has been amended to remove the duties on governing bodies to provide data to local authorities and Welsh Ministers, respectively, on teacher assessment outcomes and authorised or unauthorised absence for the pupils registered at schools in the 2019/20 school year. As such, no end of phase/key stage data in respect of our children looked after is included in this report.
- From 20th March 2020 schools were re-purposed in the emergency response to the COVID pandemic. Schools were closed for provision of statutory education and re-purposed as hubs to provide care for children of critical workers and vulnerable children. A joint approach was established between Education and Children's Services to ensure out looked after children could access this hub provision.
- On 20th April 2020, the Welsh Government published 'Stay Safe. Stay Learning: Continuity of learning policy statement'. To ensure that children looked after were able to keep learning, Children's Services identified those children looked after who had insufficient access to ICT equipment to enable them to engage in online learning. The parents and carers of all those children who were digitally excluded were provided with funding for a laptop and ensured that there was access to Wi-Fi. Designated laptop models were recommended and support was made available by the CLA Education Team and Children's Services to help set up the laptops.
- During academic year 2019-20, a total of **15** young people who were looked after by Blaenau Gwent completed their statutory school studies. All but 2 children were awarded recognised qualifications in Summer 2020. All 15 children are engaged in post 16 learning opportunities. Of the young people who were looked after and completed their statutory studies in summer 2020 half had additional learning needs and 2 had a statement of special educational needs. 13 of the 15 children attended mainstream school settings, 2 of which attended resource bases attached to mainstream schools for children with complex needs. The remaining 2 children attended Local Authority Special School settings.

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 has been established with a range of professionals from early year's, through school, college and into youth and adulthood 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 took the opportunity to

deliver a range of opportunities to consult and engage with our children to promote safe and healthy relationships via What's App and video calling. Work has also started on Beaufort Road Resource Centre to build a new facility that will offer additional facilities for our older children and care leavers. When the works are completed a timetable of support around personal relationships, friendships, self-esteem, confidence building, independence skills is planned

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.

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.

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; -

- 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.
- There has been the creation of 10 young person flats in Tredegar that has housed 17 clients to date. Unfortunately, 1 bedroom flats are still in short supply across the Authority and desperately needed.
- 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 BG.

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 seventh 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 20/21 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 safety of our children looked after, some examples although by no means exhaustive include: -

- 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.

10. **Background Documents /Electronic Links**

Appendix 1 – Action Plan 2020/21

Appendix 2 – Children Looked After Education Outcomes

Appendix 3 – Children Looked After Education – Exclusions from School

Appendix 4 – Children Looked After School Leavers Destinations