



Report of the Cabinet Member for Care Services

Child and Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel – 23rd January 2024

Corporate Parenting Update

Purpose	To provide an update on the work of the Corporate Parenting Board
Content	This report includes a summary of the role of the Corporate Parenting Board and the Corporate Parenting Pledge
Councillors are being asked to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give their views • Endorse the Pledges in their work across the Council
Lead Councillor(s)	Cllr Louise Gibbard, Cabinet Member for Care Services and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board
Lead Officer(s)	Dave Howes, Director of Social Services Julie Davies, Head of Child and Family Services
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Legal Officer	n/a
Finance Officer	n/a
Access to Services Officer	n/a

1. Background

- 1.1 The role of the Corporate Parent for looked after children is arguably the most important role of a Council. All Local Authorities have a legal and moral duty to provide the level of support, care and protection any good parent would give to their children. This includes promoting their health, education, social and emotional needs. The term 'Corporate Parent' recognises that meeting the diverse needs of these young people requires co-operation between Council service areas and other organisations, such as health, education, the police, and partner agencies.

- 1.2 Corporate parenting responsibilities fall to everyone across the council not just the Corporate Parenting Board. To support a stronger approach to corporate parenting, Welsh Government have aspirations to expand this duty across the wider public sector. The Corporate Parenting Board take seriously the needs of those children and young people and the impact of any decisions that they (young people) and the council make. Councillors may have opportunities to do this through their Corporate Parenting Board or Cabinet roles, or as part of their Scrutiny responsibilities.
- 1.3 Welsh Government launched their Corporate Parenting Charter in September 2023. Welsh Ministers and Welsh Government signed up to the Charter, setting the precedent for all public bodies across Wales as well as private sector organisations. The Charter, sets out 11 principles on equality, eradicating stigma, working together, inclusive support, fulfilling ambitions, nurturing, good health, a stable home, education, thriving in the future, after care support. Swansea Council was one of the first authorities to sign up to the Charter, giving our commitment to safeguarding and promoting the rights and life chances of care-experienced children and young people in Swansea.
- 1.4 As of the end of November 2023, there were 479 looked after children, with 9 of these being unaccompanied asylum seeking children. 88% of these children were living with foster carer (156 in-house, and 69 with an Independent Fostering Agency) 160 with a kinship carer, 11 placed for adoption and 21 placed with their parent (where there is a plan for reunification). There were 487 care leavers (113 aged 15 – 18 years, and 374 aged 18 – 25 years). 21 of the care leavers were previously unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

2. Our Corporate Parenting Pledges

- 2.1 In order to fulfil our Corporate Parenting responsibilities to care experienced children and young people, the Corporate Parenting Board requested that the Participation and Children's Rights Officer for Child and Family Services worked with them to engage young people to support a better understanding of the priorities that the Board needed to focus their workplan on.
- 2.2 As a Rights Respecting Council, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is embedded within our work. This sets out the rights all children aged 0-18 years have to make sure they are healthy, happy and safe. In developing our Corporate Parenting Pledge areas (Appendix 1), it was imperative that thought was given to how the decisions of the Board affect the rights of children in Swansea. Each pledge is aligned with specific Articles from the UNCRC (Appendix 2).

2.3 The Corporate Parenting Board worked with a group of young people to explore the area's most important to them and, linked with associated rights under the UNCRC, the board have been able to prioritise a number of key developmental areas to work on. These direct conversations with young people helped the Board shape the following pledge areas that the Corporate Parenting Board have now signed up to deliver:

- No Barriers to Opportunity
- Good Education / Good Job
- Healthy Relationships
- Safe Place to Live
- Mental health
- Love, Family and Friendship
- Happiness

2.4 In practice this means Swansea Council will work with children and young people to:

- Ensure they (young people) have equal access to opportunities.
- Provide all children and young people with access to a good education and job prospects.
- Model to young people what healthy relationships look like and help them achieve this in their own lives.
- Make sure all young people feel safe where they live; ensure mental health services are available to support young people as and when they need them.
- Promote family time and lifelong connected networks for children and young people; and focus on young people's happiness as well as their safety.

2.5 Youth Voice in Action Podcasts

2.5.1 The Participation and Children's Rights Officer worked alongside The Widening Access Officer from the University Wales Trinity St David and a group of 12 young people to develop the Youth Voice In Action podcasts. These podcasts explore the 7 key areas of a young person's journey and experiences of the care system in relation to the pledge areas. The podcasts recorded an unscripted 'what matters' conversation between young people on the pledge areas and has opened topics of conversation amongst care experienced children and young people on the services that affect their lives and ways in which they can have a positive or negative affect.

2.5.2 The podcasts are youth led inspiring, thought-provoking discussions. The talented young people involved have provided amazing insights in to their care experience as well as developing skills in creating podcasts and music production. The podcast series utilises a 'mixed media digital platform' which was identified by the young people as an area lacking in positive role models for them. In creating the podcasts,

the young people are actively championing their own causes and striving for positive change.

2.5.3 To continue the positive momentum behind this area of work there are plans to continually engage with our care experienced population to understand what matters to them and support the development work which arises from the Corporate Parenting Pledges. Young people have already identified that they would like to discuss looked after child (LAC) reviews, the role of a foster carer, and residential care provision.

2.6 Developing our Services in line with the Pledges

2.6.1 Care experienced children and young people in Swansea have told us that they want more opportunities to mix with other young people with similar experiences, community members and decision makers. The Corporate Parenting Challenge is an opportunity for young people and representatives of the Corporate Parenting Board to come together to share their views and ideas. These sessions have historically been very successful in informing the development of our services however they were put on hold during COVID. Under the Corporate Children's Rights Scheme, there are plans to bring back the "Big Conversation" initiative with children and young people across Swansea in school settings. However, many of our care experienced young people have expressed that they do not tell their peers in school that they are living with people other than their parents, due to the stigma that they feel is attached to being looked after. It is important to create a safe space where young people feel valued, respected, and supported, allowing them to thrive and reach their full potential. The corporate parenting challenge will provide an appropriate safe space for our care experienced population to share ways in which we can positively effect change in their lives and allows for the corporate parenting board to form their work plan with children and young people who are care experienced. The challenge will be run through workshops, games, conversations, interactive activities, and presentations in a young person friendly space. The outcome of the challenge event will both shape and feed into the work of the Corporate Parenting Board and also Swansea's Children's Rights Scheme. By involving care experienced young people in these activities, we can foster a sense of belonging, build trust, and develop stronger relationships with care experienced individuals.

2.6.2 Corporate Parenting Board receives developmental updates from a number of service areas which have allowed us to identify the following work which is assisting in developing our services in line with the pledges:

- Development of a Charter for Care Experienced Parents – the aim of this charter is to strengthen corporate parenting support for parents in and leaving care through a range of support that should be available to young people before and after they become parents.

- Foster Swansea Wales continues to develop the placement offer for children and young people, recognising the importance of maintaining connections and providing a loving and stable environment for children in care. The team works with not only approved Foster Carers, Kinship Foster carers but also Special Guardians – promoting legal permanence for children and support.
- The Service Quality Unit continues to focus on working towards the Corporate Parenting pledge “what a best life” looks like for our care experienced population and ensuring that young people have a voice in their care planning.
- Western Bay Adoption Services continue to grow and develop their offer for adoptive families. Priorities include increasing numbers of approved adopters, developing a respite offer for adoptive families; and reviewing ‘Letterbox’ communication for adopted children and their birth parents post 18.
- Social Services Training and Development Unit are working with partners from Gower College Swansea and the NEET (Not in Employment, Education and Training) Team to explore opportunities for the development of an apprenticeship schemes for care experienced young people.
- Our Transport Department are working with Child and Family Services to explore a pilot of a free bus pass scheme for care experienced young people in Swansea.
- Further commitment to developing our housing offer for young people leaving care.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The Corporate Parenting Board has committed to the pledges that were co-produced with care experienced children and young people, and to continuing to develop our services to ensure that care experienced children and young people are able to access the right support from the right service, at the right time thus promoting their health, education, social and emotional needs.

4. Legal implications

- 4.1 None

5. Finance Implications

- 5.1 None

6. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 6.1 None

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Corporate Parenting Pledges

Appendix 2 – Pledge Areas and Associated Rights Infographic

Appendix 3 – Corporate Parenting Board workplan