

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2018/19 - November 2019

The reports sets out the governance and membership of the Board; details the work plan; outlines key achievements and sets the work plan for the next year

I ask that Council notes the content of the report, recognises its fit for propose and firmly established governance, celebrates the achievements made and recognises the planned programme of continuous improvement.

All elected members share a special responsibility as corporate parents for all our children in and leaving care. Together Officers of the Council and the Trust are tasked to act as good parents to ensure our children and young people are safe, secure and achieve to the best of their ability.

The Corporate Parenting Board works with Officers to ensure our children have the best support, improved outcomes and a direct voice and influence on the Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board comprises elected members and members of the Children in Care Council (young advisors); its fundamental purpose is to ensure that the Council and Doncaster Children's Services Trust effectively discharge their role as Corporate Parents for all the children and young people in their care.

The Corporate Parenting Board provides a forum for elected members and Officers of the Council and Trust to work together to improve outcomes for, both children in care and for those young people who are transitioning to adulthood - wherever they live - in our children's homes; foster homes; with kinship carers, (family members other than a parent); those at home with their birth parents and those living in supported accommodation or their own tenancies to provide the best possible care and safeguarding in the same way that a good parent would care for their child.

Key to the role of the Corporate Parent is that of elected members holding services to account; challenging service delivery and acting as champions and advocates for children in and leaving care.

The Corporate Parenting Board is accountable to the full Council of Doncaster MBC and as such will present an annual report to Council

This report

- reviews and recognises the achievements and progress made in the last twelve months;
- Provides an assessment of the challenges to be overcome and through the work plan how this is going to be achieved;
- Reiterates its commitment to children in care and young people transitioning to adulthood.

This annual report reviews the progress of services for our looked after children and young people leaving care.

Highlights this year include:

1. Fostering

The Trust fostering brand has continued to increase the number of people expressing an interest in fostering for the Trust, including joining our Mockingbird model. The number of applications from experienced foster carers working in the independent sector has also continued to increase. The support and the training offered continues to have a positive impact on recruitment and retention. The additional informal support offered at the bi-monthly coffee and cake sessions, facilitated by the Head of Service and fostering team manager, has seen between thirty and forty fostering families attend the events each time.

The Mockingbird Family Model service continues to make a significant difference to the offer of foster care support. Hub carers support up to ten fostering families; offering intensive support through an extended family model. Our work has received national acclaim and was commented on positively by Ofsted at the fostering inspection in November 2018, where the service was graded as Outstanding.

2. Adoption

The adoption service was graded as Outstanding at their inspection in August 2018. The number of adopters continues to rise and we have seen more adopters approved this year than last (as was the theme for the previous year). The adoption team has worked hard to ensure approvals are undertaken in a timely manner. The number of approvals of adopters was impacted slightly by timeliness of approvals but is monitored closely and is about ensuring that adoption, not birth family, is the right decision for the child.

All Local Authorities have struggled to reach the national threshold for timeliness of placements. At Doncaster Children's Trust, we place a higher percentage of hard to place children with their forever families. These children, with their more complex needs, often take longer to place and this may have a negative impact on timeliness. Despite this, timeliness for both matching and placing adoptive children in Doncaster is better than national averages.

3. Sufficiency

The Corporate Parenting Board has supported the Trust in development of the Future Place Strategy (FPS) leading to the development of two bed in-house children's homes and the extension of the Mockingbird fostering model for our children with disabilities and additional needs. The strategy will provide greater flexibility when seeking to secure local homes for our most complex and challenging children and young people. This will mean fewer of our children will live outside of the borough and is a positive step in our sufficiency strategy in that we will be providing '*the right accommodation at the right time in the right place*' for our children in and leaving care. The plan ensures that more foster carers will work within the principles of Mockingbird. A second 16+ supported home for six young people will be ready by May 2020.

We know that outcomes in terms of health, education and permanence will improve by bringing children back to Doncaster. The FPS will be cost effective, in that financial savings will be made as children will live locally and we are not at mercy of the market.

The monthly Reg.44 inspections of our children's homes and subsequent reports to the Board have been consistent throughout the year. The Reg.44 visits provide internal scrutiny on the quality of care provided to our most vulnerable children, ensuring that we achieve the best for our children in terms of their outcomes. A Reg. 44 report is provided to every Corporate Parent Board meeting written by an Independent Reviewing Officer, (IRO), who has lead responsibility for the home. At the time of writing three of our children's homes are graded Outstanding at Ofsted.

Fostering, adoption and children's homes are all independently registered with Ofsted and are rated as Outstanding or Good. One of our homes is requires improvement but, with the homes manager and team moving from an Outstanding home to this home we are hopeful that in their next inspection this home will be at least Good.

The year has seen the safe reduction of children in care numbers from a high of 542 to 529 at the time of writing. This number can fluctuate as children requiring safeguarding is not predictable as was seen in July when three families increased the number of children in care by ten. The early help offer, in partnership with DMBC, and edge of care offer has enabled earlier intervention with families to ensure support is at home and is sustainable.

The South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency, which will provide high quality and efficient adoption services for all children in South Yorkshire is still on its journey to regional agreement re the Business Case and delivery model. The intention remains that it will delivered by 1st April 2020 and that DSCT will be the host agency.

4. Participation

The Children in Care Council and DCST young advisors have been working on development of the local offer to young people leaving care and they have developed an early draft of this. They young people will work with the Corporate Parenting Board into 2020 on finalising the offer to our children and young people. The young people presented to the Board meeting in May 2019. It is the intention that further presentations to the Board will happen over the course of the next year as part of the forward plan. A young advisor sits as a Board member.

5. The Board

The role of the Corporate Parenting Board has been strengthened over the last year with the addition of the voice of young people in the guise of DCST young advisers. It continues to be chaired by the Lead Member for children's services who ensures that there is effective consideration of information and appropriate challenge to further improve services delivered by Doncaster Children's Services Trust. The voice of young people is very strong in all aspects of the Board's work, driving the service improvements cited in this document.

6. Forward plan

The plan to May 2020 has been agreed. There will be further discussion at the Board meeting in January 2020 to review the plan and to ensure that the Board feels assured that all service areas are being addressed and reported on in such detail so as to give confidence to the Board that DCST and partners are meeting the needs of our children in and leaving care. Giving assurance that children at the heart of all we do.

Julie Mepham

Director of Children's Social Work

DCST

November 2019

