

RHONDDA CYNON TAF
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
ANNUAL REPORT
2021/2022



RHONDDA CYNON TAF



CONTENTS

Chair Foreword	3 - 4
About the Corporate Parenting Board <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relevant Legislation• Meet the Corporate Parenting Board• Terms of Reference• The Vision of the Corporate Parenting Board	5 - 9
Children Looked After within RCT	10 - 11
Reports considered by the Corporate Parenting Board ~ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regulation 73 Reports• Complaints & Compliments• Advocacy• Independent Reviewing Officer Update• RCT Forum• Overview of the Community Wellbeing and Resilience Service• Cwm Taf Regional Fostering Front Door• Children Looked after 2021-22 data• Children Looked After Website advancements• Miskin• Therapeutic Families Team• Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Regional Adoption Annual Report• Fostering Service Quality of Care Annual Report• Young Carers Annual Report 2021-22• Registered Childcare Provision Annual Report 2020-21• Housing Offer for Care Leavers• Child Practice Review	12 – 19
Corporate Parenting Board – Moving Forward	20 – 23
Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme 2022/23	24 - 25
Conclusion	26

FOREWORD



Councillor Christina Leyshon
Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board

It is with great pleasure, that I present to you the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report which provides a summary of the role and work undertaken by the Board in the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

The Corporate Parenting Board is comprised of elected Members, and Officers who meet regularly as critical friends to support, challenges and strive for stronger collaborative working. The Board creates a non-judgemental environment where Officers and Members can freely voice their opinions to ensure the best possible outcomes for the children and young people who are looked after in RCT.

As a Board we have sought to understand the lived experiences of children growing up in the care of the Council and of care experienced young people to ensure they are safe, healthy, and leading happy and fulfilling lives. Feedback from Children and young people we receive from various means plays an integral part in RCT's improvement journey. Our children and young people's voices help us to keep focused at ground level and influence the development of services the right way.

As a Council it is vital that we take steps to be the best corporate parent and corporate family that we can be. I am committed to doing everything I can to support children and care leavers so they can benefit from the many opportunities our Borough has to offer.

During the 2021/22 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board have, considered a plethora of reports, which were inclusive of various stories of success. Regular updates were more important than ever as the Corporate Parenting Board sought assurance that both staff and young people were provided with support. The continued concerns in relation to the Pandemic and emerging concerns linked to its persistence means that the emotional and physical welfare of all young people has been a key

priority for the Council. We have endeavoured to ensure the pandemic has not prevented the continuation of key services and we remain committed to ensuring that the children and young people of Rhondda Cynon Taf are safe from harm and given the care and support that they deserve, regardless of numbers.

As such, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to all Members of the Corporate Parenting Board, both new and longstanding; and, of course, to the Officers for their ongoing support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Leysha', is centered on the page. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

WHAT IS THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD?

The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced in 1998 by the then Secretary of State for Health, Frank Dobson, who outlined the duties of members towards Children who are Looked After: *“For children who are looked after, your council has a legal and moral duty to try to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would give*

to their children...you should do your utmost to make sure that those children in public care get a good start in life..."

LEGISLATION

- **The Children and Social Work Act 2017 set out seven corporate parenting principles, to which councils should have regard in exercising their responsibilities to looked after children and care leavers:**
 1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
 2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
 3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
 4. To help those children and young people gain access to, and make best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
 5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
 6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
 7. To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living

- **The goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: -**
 1. A more Equal Wales - A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic circumstances);

2. A Healthier Wales - A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood; and
 3. A Wales of Cohesive Communities - Attractive, safe, viable and well-connected.
- **The Council's Corporate Plan 'Making a Difference' 2020-2024, which is guided by the Vision of making Rhondda Cynon Taf "the best place in Wales to live, work and play, where people and businesses are independent, healthy and prosperous.**
1. PRIORITY: Ensuring **PEOPLE:** are independent, healthy, and successful - *Improving services for children and young people and ensuring the needs of children are considered in everything we do.*

MEET THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD



*Councillor C Leyshon
(Chair)*



*Councillor G Caple
(Vice-Chair)*



Councillor E Griffiths



Councillor S Rees-Owen



Councillor J Bonetto



Councillor L Hooper



Councillor J Bonetto



Councillor Geraint Hopkins

**Following the departure of Councillor J Rosser and Councillor Geraint Hopkins from Cabinet in 2021, Councillor G Caple and Councillor J Bonetto were appointed to the Corporate Parenting Board for remainder of the Municipal Year.*

“As Councillors, you have a major role to play in ensuring that those children who are cared for by your council have the best care that they can possibly receive...the duty on you is to do all you can to ensure these children can be the best they can be.”

Keith Towler, Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2009.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- To take the lead in ensuring that the Council fulfils its responsibilities as corporate parent to children who are looked after and formulate Council policy in respect of children who are looked after and children in need.
- To ensure that all Groups and divisions within the Council work together in order to promote best outcomes for children who are looked after and children in need.
- To promote effective relationships with key partner agencies in the best interests of children who are looked after and children in need.
- To monitor the implementation of the Action Plan arising from the Best Value Review of Services to children looked after, in addition to monitoring outcomes for children looked after and children in need.
- To consider the outcomes and promote positive learning practices following consideration of Child Practice Reviews.
- In accordance with HMIP to routinely review the offending rates of CLA by gender to ensure that the Corporate Parenting Board understand patterns of offending by girls and are able to take actions to address where necessary.
- To consider the impact of relevant other systems/agencies (e.g., health, courts, schools) and see how these could be improved.
- To seek the views of children looked after - the advocacy service will be asked to facilitate.
- To invite representatives from other agencies to attend as appropriate.
- To report directly to Cabinet through an Annual report of the Board.

Vision of the Corporate Parenting Board

The role of the corporate parent is to seek for children in public care the outcomes every good parent would want for their own children. The local authority has a legal and moral duty to provide support to the children it is responsible for looking after.

All Elected Members must be confident that the children who are looked after within RCT:

- Are safe.
- Have good homes in a secure and caring environment.
- Are placed within the local authority area, close to their homes and communities, as far as is possible.
- Have decent schooling.
- Are not being drawn into antisocial behavior.
- Are healthy.
- Are developing socially and emotionally.
- Are provided with help to cope with the problems they have in growing up.
- Are prepared for their transition to adulthood.
- Have ambitions for themselves.
- Are helped to achieve to the maximum of their ability.
- Have high aspirations and are able to show pride in their achievements
- Are provided with support to cope with their failures.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Children Looked After remains a key priority and the Council continues to strive for a safe reduction in Children Looked After numbers and to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children and young people.

As at the 31st March 2022, there were a total of 655 children and young people within the Local Authority's care. The demographic has been broken down and compared to that of the previous year in the tables below.

Children Looked After by Age Group

Age Band	Total as at 31/03/2022	Total as at 31/03/2021
0-3	99	124
4-7	111	121
8-11	166	170
12-14	130	144
15	49	41
16	46	47
17	54	47
Total	655	<u>694</u>

Figures show that the highest age band remains at 8 - 11 years.

Children Looked After by Gender

Gender	Total as at 31/ 03/ 2022	Total as at 31/03/21
Female	284	297
Male	371	397
Total	<u>655</u>	<u>694</u>

The Gender figures show that as at 31st March 2022, 86 more males than females remain within the Local Authority's care, which is less than the figures from March 2021, where there were 100 more males than females.

Children Looked After by Placement Type

CLA Placement Type	Total as at 31/03/2022	Total as at 31/03/2021
Independent Sector Foster Placement	119	139
RCT Foster Carers	153	167
RCT Relative Foster Carers	229	234
Placed for Adoption	17	16
Placed with Parents	66	73
Education Placement	2	2
Other Lodgings	6	1
Independent Sector Residential Sector	52	50
RCT Residential Care	10	11
Secure	1	1
Total	<u>655</u>	<u>694</u>

It is recognised that each young person has a plethora of needs and that the most suitable placement type is unique to the individual.

The data shows that most children and young people within Rhondda Cynon Taf are placed in foster placements, and in particular, with Relative Foster Carers.

Where safe and possible to do so, children and young people are placed with their parents.

It is noted that a key priority of the Regional Adoption Collaboration is to increase its supply of adopters.

UPDATES TO THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

REGULATION 73 REPORTS

Regular updates are presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in respect of the current position of the residential Children's Homes and respite service. The reports are exempt from the public to ensure that the Board receive a detailed picture of the goings on at each home, and are inclusive of case studies, which inform us of the everyday challenges faced by our hardworking staff, any areas of concern and, of course, the wellbeing of the children who occupy the homes.

Each of the reports received during the Municipal Year, provided the Corporate Parenting Board with honest and reliable feedback from the young people who occupy the homes and further insight into the challenges associated with looking after and trying to develop young people who have been disadvantaged.

SOCIAL SERVICES COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

The Corporate Parenting Board receives quarterly updates in respect of the operation and effectiveness of the statutory Social Services complaints and compliments procedure. At each meeting, Members monitor the number of complaints received, the nature of the complaints and any lessons learnt, along with noting those enquiries received from Elected Members, A.M's and M.P's.

The importance of feedback from those who use the services is invaluable to the Corporate Parenting Board. During the year, Members were provided with detailed and honest feedback in response to questions around the updates. It was pleasing to note that the service had been used by Elected Members and A.M and M.P colleagues, which builds upon the already strong relationship with officers.

ADVOCACY

Following the appointment of Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru as the Local Authority's advocacy service, the Corporate Parenting Board have received regular and informative updates at its meetings. The Board are provided with a detailed breakdown of issues by age, gender, referral source and type, along with information on the take up of the active offer. This information enables both TGP Cymru and Children Services to discuss issues that affect service delivery in the community on a strategic level and to work in partnership to provide improved and better outcomes.

The Board Members were assured to hear during the November 2021 update, that a more streamlined approach to risk assessments were now being taken forward to reduce delays in accessing the advocacy service in the future. Members also heard of the complexities of the role of an advocate representing young people and officers reassured that the communication between the Authority and the advocacy service will continue to be built upon.

[More information on the services provided by Tros Gynnal Plant \(TGP\) Cymru can be found here.](#)

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER UPDATES

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (referred to as the SSWB Act) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 and 16 (referred to as the CPPCR Regulations) provide legislation and guidance pertaining to the role and functions of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires the Local Authority to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers to conduct reviews for Children who are Looked After and monitor the Local Authority's performance in relation to implementing the care plans for individual children. As such, regular reports are presented to the Board to monitor the activities of the IRO service.

RCT FORUM

The RCT Forum provides looked after young people and care leavers in RCT with opportunities to have their voice heard and to enable their life experiences to contribute at a strategic, policy and legislative level both locally and nationally.

During the 2021/22 Municipal Year, the RCT Forum attended meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board to provide a summary of activities being undertaken. The Forum ran sessions to engage with new Members of the group; in addition to networking with several external organisations working with care leavers throughout the Local Authority. Key themes were identified which were impacting individuals within the RCT area. These included difficulties in maintaining healthy relationships, independent living, and overall feelings of isolation. During the next quarter the Forum the Board would like to receive further information.

The Board were reassured of the effectiveness of the services offered by RCT Forum through a young person representative who highlighted the positive experiences they have had as part of the group and the impact on their life. The young person spoke positively of the activities undertaken as part of the forum which provided access to community networks, independence, and the attainment of new skills. The young person also spoke of the positive role of the forum through the pandemic,

with the continued support to young people across RCT.

Receiving such feedback on the services provided by the Council for Children who are Looked After and care leavers to the Board is fundamental in helping the Board ensure that the provisions and support provided by the Council are adding benefit to the people that require them, and to ensure that the young people within the service are treated as equal to those young people outside of the service.

OVERVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND RESILLIENCE SERVICE

In November 2017, the Cwm Taf Public Services Board (PSB) agreed to work with the Welsh Government to undertake a joint collaborative approach to redesigning Early Years arrangements across Cwm Taf. The aim of the work was to reconstruct the Early Years and Flying Start service, to create an integrated delivery model.

Receiving updates allows the Corporate Parenting Board to compare the annual data and to monitor the progress and impact of the service.

[More information on the Resilient Families Service can be accessed here.](#)

CWM TAF REGIONAL FOSTERING FRONT DOOR

The Corporate Parenting Board were informed of two significant developments which were made during the 2021/22 Municipal year. Due to challenges with the recruitment of mainstream foster carers, it was confirmed that Bridgend County Borough Council has joined the Regional Front Door to further expand on the collaboration and share resources and good practice. As of now 3 Local Authorities, RCT CBC, Merthyr Tydful CBC and Bridgend CBC have all confirmed dedication towards foster carer recruitment. The primary objective of the team is to achieve a net gain in approved mainstream foster carers.

The launch of Foster Wales was a huge accomplishment which was achieved through the collaboration of all 22 Local Authorities within Wales. The aim of the project is targeted towards attracting younger generation to become foster carers.

In order to monitor the progress of the service, the Corporate Parenting Board receive an analysis of key performance data and details on the future developments of the service.

[More information on the Cwm Taf Regional Fostering Front Door service can be accessed here.](#)

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER ACADEMIC DATA 2021-2022 DATA

It is noted that RCT has many Children Looked After, in comparison to other Local Authorities and that there are various risk factors which can adversely impact the educational outcomes of Children Looked After. Notwithstanding that, improving the educational attainment of Children Looked After remains a key focus of the Corporate Parenting Board and each year, Members receive performance data for the previous academic year.

Summary of Data for the academic year 2020-2021*

1. Incidents of Fixed Term (FT) Exclusions in Autumn and Spring term 2020/2021 involving RCT Children who are Looked After:

Cohort	Number of FT exclusions	% of students who received a FT exclusion	Cohort of pupils of statutory school age	% of statutory school aged pupils excluded
CLA	28	15	455	3.20%
Non CLA	887	614	33220	1.85%

Source: Plasc Jan 21 (33,708)

2. Attendance Levels of Children who are Looked between 02/09/2020 and 20/07/2021 compared with Non CLA:

Overall attendance in RCT schools	
CLA pupils	Non CLA pupils
89.9%	87%
Primary school attendance	
93.1%	91.1%
Secondary school attendance	
86.1%	85.4%

3. In response to the disrupted educational experience due to COVID -19, PDG LAC money provided an offer of online tuition in Maths or English for all Key Stage 4 pupils taking exams. Pupils who engaged with tuition in Years 10 and 11:

Year group	No of pupils participating
10	23 OUT OF 31 eligible pupils
11	16 out of 25 eligible pupils

**Note: Any overall data for the academic year 2020 – 2021 needs to be viewed with caution due to the impact of school closures in Summer Term 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic which means that direct comparisons with previous academic years are not possible.*

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER WEBSITE ADVANCMENTS

the Corporate Parenting Board received an update on the advancements made on the Children Looked after 2Side Website. The website is now hosted by the Wicid.TV and has become more interactive and has been developed to be more targeted to children and young people's needs within RCT. A range of services have been introduced such as an online Consultation document which allows young people to post their reviews on aspects they are enjoying and areas for improvement. Receiving such feedback permits the team to make review services and attract more children and young people to the website.

[More information on the Children Looked After Website can be accessed here](#)

MISKIN

Miskin delivers intensive family focused evidence-based interventions, which aim to improve parenting capacity to enable families to care for their children with the minimum statutory intervention. Services are delivered through individual, family, group work and holiday programmes.

The focus of the Service includes:

- High level of need, and if intensive supports are not provided the child/children are at risk of being accommodated;
- Family need an intensive period of support for child/children to return to their care;
- High level of assessed need for a child looked after, risk of placement breakdown without intensive support; and
- Child looked after requires support to return from an out of county placement to either home or a more local placement.

The Corporate Parenting Board receive annual updates in respect of the Miskin service, to monitor the effectiveness of the service, particularly at a time when demand exceeds capacity.

THERAPEUTIC FAMILIES TEAM

The Therapeutic Families Team (TFT) is a multidisciplinary team, created to offer consultation, therapeutic assessments and interventions to children and families in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The Team works with:

- Families assessed as high need where support from the Families Therapeutic Team would add value to the Resilient Families Service intervention;
- Family receiving a service from statutory Children's Services and child/ren assessed as being at risk of becoming Children Looked After (CLA); Children Looked After whose placement has been assessed as being at risk of breakdown where therapeutic support could promote placement stability;
- Children Looked After who require therapeutic support to assist in a return home to live with parents/family/friends or live independently;
- Children Looked After placed out of county who require therapeutic support to assist in moving to local placements; and
- Families assessed as high need where support from the Families Therapeutic Team would add value to the statutory Children's Services intervention.

The Corporate Parenting Board received the second annual report of the Therapeutic Families Team which provided a detail breakdown of the services provided to families such as consultations, therapeutic assessments and interventions for children and families in RCT. The Board was reassured of the Therapeutic Families Team improvements since its inaugural year by supporting and engaging with families and producing positive outcomes.

VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) provides a regional adoption service to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council. VVC is one of the five regional Collaboratives which form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS). All adoption services are required to provide an annual review of their service as set out in Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007.

The Board were supplied with the sixth VCC annual report which covers the periods 1st April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

The supply of adopters remains a challenge for Local Authorities and as such, receiving the annual data and strategies for improvement of the Regional Adoption Service is vital to the Corporate Parenting Board.

The report was also considered in depth by the Council's [Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee](#).

FOSTERING SERVICE QUALITY OF CARE ANNUAL REPORT

The Fostering Service Quality of Care Annual Report is compiled as required under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016. Regulation 52 of the Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018 also requires the Local Authority Manager to put suitable arrangements in place to establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality of service.

The Corporate Parenting Board monitored the progress in relation to carer support and consultation, education, establishing the Regional Front Door Service and the priorities for the year ahead.

[More information on the Fostering Service Quality of Care Annual Report can be found here](#)

YOUNG CARERS ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

The Young Carers Service now sits within the wider all-age Carers Support Project following a review and restructure carried out towards the end of 2018/2019. The review identified a need for a strategic lead for carers within the authority and the Service Manager for Carers now has responsibility for all carer issues, including young carers, young adult carers and adult carers. The restructure resulted in changes to the support provided to young carers. The service still has a dedicated Young Carer Assessor who now sits within the wider Information, Advice and Assistance function of Children's Services. This is to ensure that statutory obligations are met in terms of assessment and monitoring of young carers.

The support services for young carers (aged 5-17) continues to be provided on a commissioned basis by Action for Children. Specific support is available via an externally funded post for Young Adult Carers (aged 18-25). Sibling carers (Children whose sibling has additional needs) receive limited support via the Carers Support Project.

The Young Carers Annual Report summarises the support provided to young carers (aged 0-17) and young adults (aged 18-25) during a turbulent year and recognises the key developments achieved despite extreme challenging circumstances, specifically from the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

REGISTERED CHILDCARE PROVISION 2020-21

The Corporate Parenting Board received updates on the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) registered childcare provision settings overseen by the Community, Wellbeing and Resilience Service (CWRS).

Since updates received during May 2019, significant service developments have taken place in respect of childcare provision across Rhondda Cynon Taf. During this Municipal Year, a new purpose-built Flying Start childcare setting has been established on the Llwynypia campus of Coleg Y Cymoedd. This has replaced the historical Flying Start provision in the previous Ynsycynon Primary School site.

HOUSING OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS

The Housing Offer for Care leavers report is compiled based on Section 78 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 which imposes a duty upon the Local Authority to safeguard and promote the well-being of each child it looks after. Under section 104-118, a Local Authority has similar duties to promote the well-being of care leavers. During this Municipal year, the Corporate Parenting Board were provided with information about how 16+ looked after young people and care leavers are provided with move on accommodation and support.

The Corporate Parenting Board was reassured on the duty of care of the team to ensure young people are housed in accommodation fit for purpose where they feel safe and supported.

CHILD PRACTICE REVIEW

A Child Practice Review is conducted in line with the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Children Board's duties under Working Together to Safeguard People Volume 3) which is issued under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

The process is focussed on positive outcomes for children and young people through learning lessons to improve multi agency safeguarding practice. It includes different types of reviews; concise and extended as well as multi agency practitioner forums.

The report was exempt from the public to ensure that the Board receive a detailed overview of the recommendations of 2 Concise Child Practice Reviews (CPR's) conducted by Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Children Board (CTMSB) and the measures Children Services had taken to embed and evaluate review learning in response.

THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – MOVING FORWARD

In the 2022/23 Municipal Year, key areas of focus of the Corporate Parenting Board will include:

REGULAR PERFORMANCE DATA

It is essential that the Corporate Parenting Board regularly receive the qualitative data and statutory updates. The monitoring of regular performance data allows the Corporate Parenting Board to effectively analyse key areas and determine ways to further improve and enhance the services the Council provides. The updates will include:

- Regulation 73 Reports
- Social Services Complaints & Compliments
- Advocacy Updates
- CIW Inspections reports of the Children's Homes
- Child Practice Review
- Performance (IRO)
- Accommodation
- Care to Work
- Adoption
- Education

The Corporate Parenting Board will receive annual updates from the following services to continue to monitor the progress, achievements, and future aspirations:

- Miskin
- Therapeutic Families Team
- Resilient Families Service
- Youth Offending Service
- Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Regional Adoption Service
- Fostering Services Quality of Care
- Registered Childcare Provision
- Young Carers
- RCT Forum

INTERACTION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

The Corporate Parenting Board welcome the attendance of looked after young people and care leavers at its meetings and recognise that their voice must be at the centre of all discussions. The Board receive reports containing data and statistics, but the opportunity to hearing the first-hand experiences of the young person is invaluable. Encouraging their participation will be key moving forward as it provides Members with further insight into the areas where improvements need to be made.

During the Municipal Year, it was reported that the RCT Forum would aim to establish a cohort of group members to develop and further understand the issues Children and young people face in order to create a clear implementation plan. The Corporate Parenting Board welcome an update on this going forward.

In 2018, RCT Children Services supported children who were looked after to complete the Your Life, Your Care Survey. The survey had been developed through the Bright Spots Programme to measure the well-being of children looked after.

Following the survey, the following areas of improvement were identified:

‘Social workers need to:

- *Ensure that children and young people understand who they are.*
- *Work with children and young people to involve them in decisions.*
- *Explain to every child why they are in care and regularly review this with them to establish if they would like more information.*
- *Continue to communicate with schools to identify and help children who feel bullied at school and those who feel that they do not have a good friend.*
- *Give carers further training in therapeutic parenting.*
- *Consider not just organised activities but contact with nature when reviewing opportunities to have fun/hobbies*
- *Regularly review contact plans taking into account children and young people’s wishes and feelings*
- *Be aware of gender difference and give opportunities to young people (11-18 years) to build self-esteem and a positive self-image.’*

The Corporate Parenting Board wishes to continue to monitor the implementation of the areas identified to ensure that they have been incorporated into improvement plans; and welcome further updates from future surveys, which would be conducted on a two-year basis.

INDEPENDENT SECTOR PLACEMENTS

The Corporate Parenting Board recognise the importance of effective placements and continual support for children and young people in RCT.

During the 2021/22 Municipal Year, the Board did not receive any updates in respect of the independent sector placements and therefore, feel it is necessary that an update is provided in the next Municipal Year. This will allow new Board Members to have a greater understanding of the supporting services and channels offered to looked after young people.

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The Corporate Parenting Board recognise the educational disadvantages often experienced by young people who are looked after, which can have an adverse effect on opportunities moving into higher education and into adulthood.

The Corporate Parenting Board wishes to receive further updates in respect of Post-16 employment, education and training programmes offered by the Council and its uptake by the young people.

During the next Municipal Year, the Board wishes to extend an invitation to the Central South Consortium to update Members on the Pupil Deprivation Grant and the Cluster Based Model.

The Board would also like to receive an interim update in respect of the Virtual Schools Model, following the paper commissioned by Welsh Government - An integrated approach to improving educational outcomes for looked after children in Wales written by Sir Alasdair Macdonald. The paper looked at integrated local authority approaches to supporting Children Looked After, with a particular focus upon how the Virtual School model in England and Scotland could be used as a basis for local authorities in Wales to promote the educational achievement of CLA.

The Board will continue to receive education attainment data.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER PREVENTION STRATEGY

The Corporate Parenting Board wish to review the Looked After Children Prevention Strategy which will outline the services being developed to enhance the offer to families and resources. As part of the role of the Corporate Parenting Board it's to continue the work of safely supporting families to stay together.

ELECTED MEMBER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

It is recognised that the role of the Corporate Parent is a collective duty of the Council as a whole and as such, refresher training is welcomed to Board Members and to all Elected Members of the Council to further enhance knowledge and to strengthen the Council's commitment to the children and young people within our care. This will be particularly beneficial for new Members.

THE WORK OF WELSH GOVERNMENT TO STRENGTHEN AND EXTEND CORPORATE PARENTING

The Programme for Government, [Taking Wales Forward](#), commits to “examine ways of ensuring looked after children enjoy the same life chances as other children and if necessary reform the way they are looked after”. As part of its focus, Welsh Government policy intent is to strengthen corporate parenting across all departments within the local authority, which will enable better partnership between services to enhance the outcomes for Children Looked After.

The Corporate Parenting Board welcome future updates in relation to the work and the opportunity to consider any amendments to its Terms of Reference.

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER AND YOUNG CARERS

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Corporate Parenting Board appreciate that issues with mental health and wellbeing are likely to have risen and therefore, would like to receive an update on what support is available to young people.

FRONTLINE MEETINGS

During the 2021/22 Municipal year, the Corporate Parenting Board had the opportunity to meet virtually with staff working in Children Services in order to better understand the work undertaken to safeguard the health and wellbeing of children in Rhondda Cynon Taf, particularly those in corporate care, their various needs and the means of understanding the needs of staff.

The Board aimed to understand the challenges faced by staff, particularly during the Pandemic relating to staff turnover, retention, and wellbeing.

The feedback received from the meetings was invaluable for the Corporate Parenting Board as it strengthens service strategy implementation for the overall support for staff and the children, and young people who are looked after in RCT.

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2022-2023

A 2022-23 work programme for the Corporate Parenting Board is set out below. The work programme is a fluid document, which can be amended by Members at any given point to accommodate a change in priorities. The programme is based on factors highlighted within the Board's Annual Report and does not include the statutory updates presented to the Board.

REPORT	DATE
Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme	July, 2022
Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022-23	July 2022
Charter for Children in Care and Leaving Care	July 2022
Scrutiny Healthy Lives Report	July 2022
Children Looked After Strategy Update	July 2022
Charter for Parents in Care and Leaving Care	July 2022
Registered Childcare Provision Annual Update 2021-22	September 2022
Youth Offending Service Annual Report 2021-22 & reducing the criminalisation of care experienced children and young adults	September 2022
RCT Forum	September 2022
Pupil Deprivation Grant - Update	September 2022
Children Looked After Website Advancement Update	September 2022
Young Carers Annual Report 2021-22	November 2022
Miskin Annual Report and Therapeutic Families Team Annual Report 2021-22	November 2022
Independent Sector Placements	November 2022
Vale, Valley & Cardiff Regional Adoption annual report 2021-22	November 2022
Housing Offer to Care Leavers	November 2022
Fostering Quality of Care Annual Report	January 2023

RCT Forum January 2023

Children Looked After Education Data and Improvement Strategy Update January 2023

Children Looked After Website Advancement Update January 2023

Young Carers Annual Report 2022-23 March 2023

Employment, Education and Training Programmes for Children Looked After March 2023

Virtual School Model pilot – Interim Evaluation of Year 1 March 2023

Frontline Visits March 2023

CONCLUSION

Thank you for taking the time to read the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report for the 2021/22 Municipal Year. The report seeks to highlight the scope of work undertaken during the past year and the Council's ongoing commitment to improving the outcomes for the children and young people who are looked after in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

In the 2022/23 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board will ensure that a full and varied work programme is set, which will focus on the above-mentioned reports, as well as any other topical or urgent business which may arise.

In summary, the Corporate Parenting Board will continue to benefit from strong membership with positive relationships between Councillors and Officers who will meet regularly throughout the year.

We will continue to seek the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in our care. Despite uncertain times and the national rise in the number of children who are becoming looked after, the Corporate Parenting Board and the Council as a whole are committed to its safeguarding duties.