

A Guide to Corporate Parenting in North Somerset

January 2020 – May 2022



We are ambitious for all children, we will always strive for high standards to ensure we make a difference to improve the lives of children and young people in North Somerset



Foreword

Dear Colleagues

Our experiences in early childhood and through to our teenage years are critical in shaping our future happiness and set the foundations for what we can achieve throughout our adult lives. Good parenting is vital. Therefore, the role of a Corporate Parent is one of the most important responsibilities of the local authority. We have a legal duty to support children in our care and those leaving our care in the way that any good parent would unconditionally support their own children. This is a role that we take very seriously. The early circumstances and experiences of cared for children and young people mean that they are often disadvantaged in life. Narrowing the gap between the achievements of children in care and all children requires us to provide higher standards of parenting, care and nurture to our vulnerable children and young people.

Individuals and individual teams cannot do this in isolation. It is essential that every department within the Council and our partner organisations share the responsibilities of the Corporate Parent. As a Corporate Parent, we are committed to do the very best to improve outcomes for our children and young people. To this end, we have made a promise to our children and young people. Our challenge is to deliver on this promise, putting these children and young people at the heart of all that we do so that they have the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential.



Catherine Gibbons

Councillor Catherine Gibbons
Executive Member for Children's Services
and Lifelong Learning
Children & Young People's Services

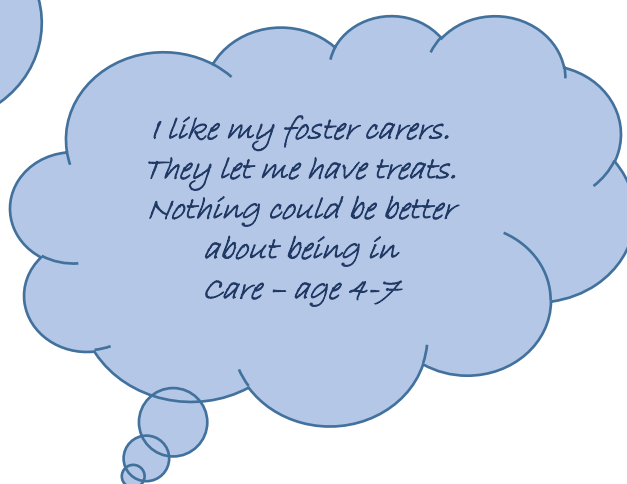
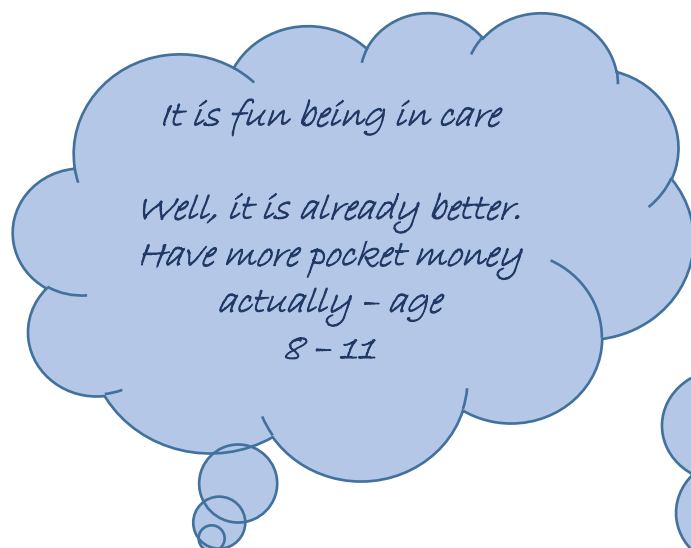


Sheila Smith

Sheila Smith
Director of People Communities

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1. Introduction

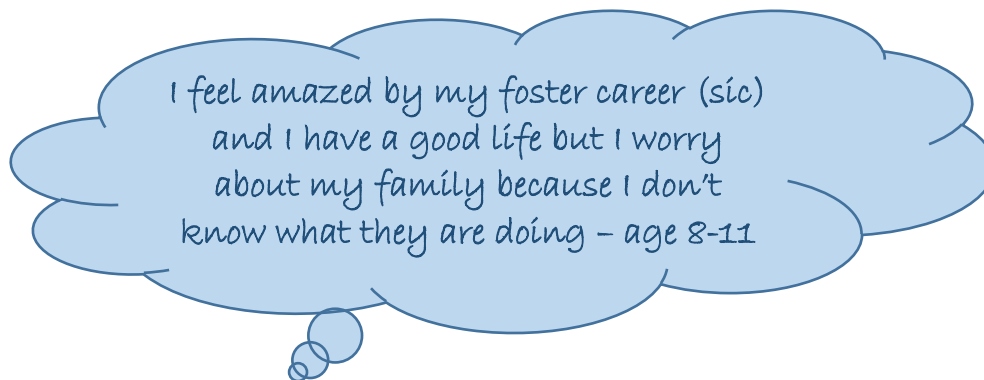
North Somerset Council's vision is to make North Somerset a truly great place for children, where every child is safe and has the opportunity to flourish and enjoy the benefits of a happy family life.

When a child or young person cannot live with their birth family for whatever reason and becomes looked after, parental responsibility transfers to the local authority; this is referred to as 'Corporate Parenting'.

Acting as a corporate parent for our children and young people is the most important duty for councillors in North Somerset. Corporate Parenting must seek to ensure supportive relationships where young people feel cared for, not just looked after. Good Corporate Parenting involves championing the rights of children looked after and care leavers and ensuring that they have access to good services and support from the local authority, partner agencies and individual lead practitioners.

We know from national data and academic research that children and young people who are looked after by the local authority can be at risk of poorer outcomes than their peers who are able to remain at home with their families; for example, young people who have been in care are more likely to leave school with fewer qualifications, and they also have a higher risk of not being engaged in education, employment or training after leaving school.

The use of the word 'our' is significant within North Somerset and signifies the responsibility and commitment we have to our children who are in or are leaving our care. We are passionate about outcomes for our children and our expectation is that all employees and councillors in North Somerset care for and care about our children and young people as we do our own children.



2. Why do elected members and employees of North Somerset need to know about Corporate Parenting?

Every elected member, when elected to represent their ward, becomes a Corporate Parent as part of their role. Whilst much of the responsibility for actually delivering care for children looked after and care leavers is delegated to staff within the children's workforce, this is not limited to professionals within the children's social work service, but applies to all members of staff who may come into contact with our children, including officers and staff within the local authority who deliver services and support on behalf of their elected members, schools and healthcare practitioners.

Corporate Parenting was first enshrined in legislation through the Children's Act (1989). Although it does not have a formal legal definition, it is commonly understood to mean that officers and elected members of the local authority have a responsibility to take the same interest in the progress, attainments and wellbeing of children and young people who are looked after as a reasonable parent could be expected to have for their own children.

Corporate Parenting extends to care leavers, as the local authority remains responsible for children who have been in their care up to the age of twenty-five. The benchmark we adopt as Corporate Parents is '**Would this be good enough for my child?**'

In the Keep on Caring 2016 government strategy for care leavers a 'good' Corporate Parent is described as:

'A good corporate parent should have the same aspirations for a child in care or care leaver as a good parent would have for their own child. It means providing them with the stability and support they need to make progress; and helping them to access new opportunities and experiences that inspire them to set ambitious goals for themselves. It means celebrating their successes, but also recognising that they will sometimes make mistakes and need help to get back on track. It also means supporting them to gain the skills and confidence to live independent lives, while letting them know that they have someone to call on for help if the going gets tough'

Keep on Caring, Department for Education, 2016

Every good parent knows that children require a safe and nurturing environment in which to grow and thrive. Parents protect and support their children in coping with the dangers and risks of everyday life. Parents are ambitious for their children and strive to support them to reach their potential. Parents celebrate and share in their children's achievements, however large or small. Parents provide care unconditionally to their child to support them to achieve.

It is vital that we recognise the importance of our partners in the statutory, voluntary and commercial sectors. It takes a community to raise a child and we must continue to work with our partners to ensure our children and young people receive high standards of support from all the different agencies, schools and colleges who meet our children.

3. Who are Corporate Parents?

The publication '*Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice*' (National Children's Bureau 2008) identifies three levels of understanding and responsibility in relation to Corporate Parenting which remain relevant. Whilst every elected member is, by definition, a Corporate Parent, not all elected members will have the same knowledge and involvement.

The National Children's Bureau helpfully break the Corporate Parenting role down into three different levels of responsibility:

1. **Universal responsibility** – applicable to all elected members, all council officers, all partners, including health, police, schools etc.
2. **Targeted responsibility** – eg. those councillors who may sit on the Corporate Parenting Panel, Fostering and/ or Adoption Panels, Scrutiny Boards etc.

3. **Specialist responsibility** – those councillors with a specific, relevant role e.g. the Lead Member for Children’s Services, Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, Chair of the Scrutiny Panel for Children’s Services.

4. **The Corporate Parenting principles enshrined in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 are:¹**

1. A local authority in England must, in carrying out functions in relation to the children and young people mentioned in subsection (2), have regard to the need:
 - a. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
 - b. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
 - c. To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
 - d. To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
 - e. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
 - f. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
 - g. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

In North Somerset, as Corporate Parents we will also:

- Always refer to our children who we look after and our care leavers as ‘ours’ and use the benchmark ‘would this be good enough for my child?’;
- Help our children and young people identify adults who they can trust, who will stick by them no matter what;
- Be there for them when they make mistakes, and make sure they are given as many chances as needed to succeed;
- Be interested in our children and young people’s successes, show our pride in their achievements, and celebrate with them.

5. **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Following our local elections in summer 2019, many new councillors were elected. This offered an opportunity to review and strengthen our Corporate Parenting Panel as new members joined.

Members of this panel reflect a key role of representing the wider Corporate Parenting responsibilities of all elected members and officers. The panel acts as advocates for our children and young people. Its role is to hold the council and its partners to account if there are gaps in service provision, and to challenge officers and partners to be ambitious for children’s outcomes.

¹ Children and Social Work Act, 2017 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/part/1/chapter/1/crossheading/corporate-parenting-principles-for-english-local-authorities/enacted>)

Its membership is made up of:

- 6 councillors from different political parties, in addition to our executive member for children education and learning
- Foster carer representative
- Designated nurse for children looked after
- Virtual school Head Teacher
- Participation worker from Unite and Ambitious Voice
- Assistant Director, Support and Safeguarding
- Service Leader, Resource Service
- Service Leader, Quality Assurance

The Panel receives reports from a wide range of officers. The views of our children looked after, and our care leavers are made available to the Panel through our annual Bright Spots survey. Our children and young people's views are also represented by our Participation Officer when she feeds back information from our young people's forums Unite and Ambitious Voice.

The expectations of members of our Corporate Parenting Panel are to:

- Champion and promote the Corporate Parenting role across the council and our partner organisations; develop your understanding of what effective Corporate Parenting looks like, e.g. through reading resources in the useful information section at the end of this guide;
- Develop your knowledge and awareness of government expectations in relation to the services provided to children looked after and care leavers, and the requirements of Ofsted when inspecting safeguarding and children looked after services;
- Review and monitor the services provided to children looked after and care leavers, by receiving and analysing the quantitative and qualitative information provided to the group, and offer appropriate support and challenge where improvements could be made;
- Review the work of the Fostering and Adoption Panels;
- Ask about planning for children looked after – are care plans regularly reviewed and updated, and are the wishes and feelings of children looked after and care leavers considered?
- Consider how the group can effectively engage with children looked after and young people, as well as their parents and carers, and ensure that their views are listened and responded to;
- Ensure that children looked after, and young people are involved in the running of the group, and in setting the priorities and work programme; e.g. support 'takeover' initiatives where young people can chair group meetings;
- Attend and support events and meetings which aim to improve outcomes for children and young people, and to celebrate their achievements;
- Question what all council directorates are doing to support our children, care leavers and foster carers.

The following pages outline ways in which all members can be effective Corporate Parents, whatever their role.

6. Our individual and collective responsibilities

It is vital that all employees of North Somerset Council understand that they too are Corporate Parents - officers and staff within the local authority deliver services and support on behalf of their elected members.

Whilst much of the responsibility for actually delivering care for our children who are looked after and care leavers is delegated to staff within the Support and Safeguarding Branch, we recognise that effective corporate parenting involves everyone, even those who do not have day to day contact with children.

Every elected member, when elected to represent their ward, and every employee of North Somerset Council becomes a Corporate Parent as part of their role. It is crucial that all elected members and employees of North Somerset Council understand and commit to the following expectations:

As an elected member, I will:

- Be aware of the role and its implications for discharging the local authority's legal responsibilities for children looked after and care leavers;
- Develop knowledge and awareness of the services available for children looked after and care leavers, both across the council and from relevant partner agencies;
- Advocate for children looked after and care leavers – ensuring their voices are heard, their needs are met, and their achievements celebrated;
- Prioritise the needs of children looked after and young people in council decision making and budget setting discussions;
- Consider the potential impact of all council decisions on children looked after, foster carers and care leavers;
- Ask appropriate questions of officers across the council, not just in children's services, about the quality of services provided to children looked after and care leavers and ensure that any issues identified are resolved in a timely manner;
- Be accessible to professionals, carers and children looked after who may wish to raise issues or concerns;
- Take an active interest in the issues facing children looked after and care leavers at a regional and national level and bring any examples of good practice or new ways of working to the attention of the Assistant Director for Children's Support and Safeguarding.

As a ward councillor, I will:

- Be aware that there are probably children looked after and care leavers living in my ward;
- Make an effort to find out about and understand the issues that children looked after and care leavers may face, and the support they may need from the local authority;
- Be aware of any specific issues in my ward which may impact on the lives of children looked after or care leavers, and champion their cause when dealing with these matters;
- Be proactive in ensuring that social workers, foster carers, children looked after, and care leavers know how to contact me;
- Attend and/or support foster carer recruitment and celebration events in my ward;

- Ensure that the Lead Member for Children’s Services and the Director of Children’s Services are made aware of any issues with services for children looked after and care leavers within my ward;
- Take an active interest in facilities for children and young people in my area, and speak to staff about how they support the inclusion of children looked after and care leavers;
- Maintain contact with the area social work and children looked after teams in my area, as well as staff in any residential homes; arrange to visit periodically and speak to staff about their experiences and challenges;
- Know what provision (e.g. housing) is available for foster carers, children looked after and young people in my ward, and speak to social workers about ensuring that all children looked after are accessing universal healthcare and dental care;
- Promote community understanding of children looked after and care leavers, and promote fostering within my ward, e.g. by providing leaflets at surgeries;
- Monitor and challenge council policy for its impact on children looked after and care leavers.

As the Executive Member for Children’s Services and Lifelong Learning, I will:

- Hold the equivalent responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services at a local political level, as required by the Children Act 2004²;
- Ensure that the needs of children looked after and care leavers across the council are prioritised; including in funding discussions;
- Make links with other executive members to ensure issues affecting children looked after and care leavers are considered and prioritised in all council decision making;
- Ensure that the views of children looked after, and care leavers are sought and used to influence service development and delivery;
- Be accountable for the actions, decisions and delivery of services for children looked after and care leavers;
- Ensure that policy or service development does not have any adverse effects on children looked after and care leavers;
- Play a leading role in partnerships on behalf of the authority; particularly with the health service, to ensure enough priority is given to children looked after and care leavers;
- Ensure that departments and agencies work with each other to ensure effective integrated working for existing services and ways of working.

As a member of Scrutiny Panel, I will:

- Consider children looked after and care leavers in all our work; consideration will not be limited to the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel;
- Examine the arrangements in place to support the wellbeing of children looked after and care leavers, monitor their effectiveness; challenge and scrutinise performance, and make recommendations for improvement ;
- Ask demanding questions of officers with responsibility for children looked after and care leaver services; seek qualitative as well as quantitative information to ensure that the experiences of children looked after are consistent with what the performance data shows, and ask questions of officers’ interpretation of the data;

² Children Act 2004, s18-19 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/section/19>)

- Ensure that issues relating to children looked after and care leavers are regularly considered at Scrutiny Panel – prioritise any areas of concern, e.g. identified through inspections or reviews;
- Involve children looked after, care leavers, parents, carers and partner agencies in the work of the Scrutiny Panel; their direct feedback, and case studies of their experiences, should drive the work and the priorities;
- Ensure that the findings and recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel have an influence on policy and encourage the sharing and embedding of good practice.

As an executive member for another Directorate, I will:

- Consider opportunities for the needs of children looked after and care leavers to be prioritised within services in our portfolio;
- Consider whether the decisions we take have an impact on children looked after and care leavers, and ensure appropriate steps are taken to mitigate any adverse effects;
- Ensure that the executive considers issues affecting children holistically, particularly links between children’s services, leisure, transport, housing policies and any other relevant areas of work.

As an employee of North Somerset Council, I will:

- Be aware of the role and its implications for discharging the local authority’s legal responsibilities for children looked after and care leavers;
- Advocate for children looked after and care leavers and be mindful of how my work might impact them;
- Be accessible to professionals, carers and children looked after who may wish to raise issues or concerns;
- Take an active interest in the issues facing children looked after and care leavers at a regional and national level;
- Offer or help to secure employment opportunities, work experience or placements for looked after young people and care leavers;
- Prioritise the needs of our children looked after and care leavers as necessary.

7. What contact should Corporate Parents have with children looked after and care leavers?

You can be an effective Corporate Parent without having to know our individual children and care leavers personally; in fact, personal contact on an individual basis is not generally appropriate, unless our children or care leavers choose to contact their local councillor, as is their right as North Somerset residents.

However, some communication and contact are valuable in helping councillors to understand the importance of the Corporate Parenting role, and in giving young people an opportunity to express their views and concerns directly to those with the authority to make decisions and shape policy. You are encouraged to attend any events you are invited to.

8. Listening to our children and young people's views

Bright Spots

It is vitally important that all Corporate Parents are aware of how our children and young people feel about the support they receive from us.

For the last five years we have been part of a research study with Oxford University Rees Centre and Coram Voice. The research study aims to improve the experience of care for all children who are looked after, give children a voice on their own wellbeing and highlight the 'Bright Spots' of practice that contribute to children flourishing in care.

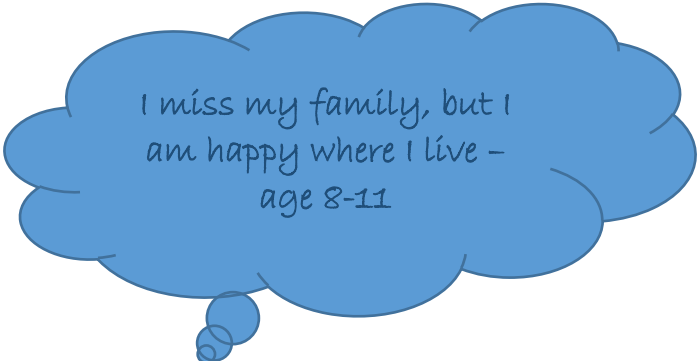
Each year our children looked after age 4 – 18 have completed an on-line survey which focuses on their wellbeing, their experiences of care and things that are important to them. This high quality, independent and evidence-based research provides us with a substantial report which includes clear messages from our children on how they view their care journey. The report gives us a clear insight into their wellbeing, their thoughts on what we are doing well and areas they would like us to improve.

In 2019, 97 children completed the survey; a response rate of 55%, the highest of all local authorities who took part across the country. The survey report is presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel. Please contact Helen.Caldwell@n-somerset.gov.uk if you would like a copy of the latest report.

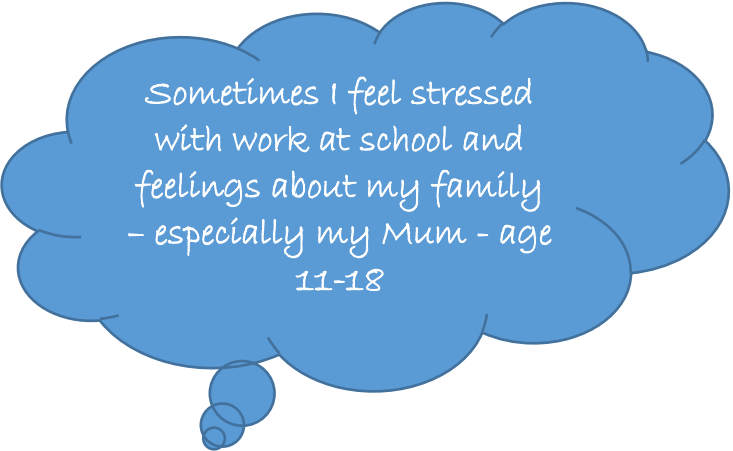
Participation groups

We run two separate participation groups: one for children looked after which is known as Ambitious Voice, and one especially for care leavers, which is called Unite.

Both groups are led by our participation worker. Unite runs every month and Ambitious Voice meets each school holiday. Following these meetings, a meeting takes place with the Director of People and Communities and our participation worker. The participation worker also attends the Corporate Parenting Panel. This way we can ensure that our young people's views are heard in a timely way by our Director and our elected members.



*I miss my family, but I
am happy where I live -
age 8-11*



*Sometimes I feel stressed
with work at school and
feelings about my family
- especially my Mum - age
11-18*

9. Our promise

As Corporate Parents, we have made a promise to our children, which has been signed by our Chief Executive Officer, our Leader of the Council, Lead Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning, and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Our promise has

recently been updated with recognition of the importance of children and young people's wellbeing. Our promise to our children and young people responds directly to the clear messages they gave us through their response in the Your Life Your Care surveys.

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL'S 

PROMISE

To all children and young people looked after by North Somerset Council, we promise to:

- find caring homes for you, where you feel settled, with bedrooms that you like
- find carers who you can trust, who support you with your worries and celebrate your successes
- help you to understand why you are not living with your parent(s)
- help you to spend time with your parents, brothers and sisters if that's what you want
- make sure you know who your social worker is and how you can contact them
- make sure you have opportunities to have fun, spend time on your hobbies and explore the outdoors
- support your education and help you with your homework and learning, college and career options
- ensure you have an adult in school or college, who you can trust, who looks out for you and celebrates your progress
- always ask your views when there are decisions to be made, putting your wishes and feelings first whenever we can
- show our trust in you at home, in school and in your reviews, and offer support when things sometimes go wrong
- help you with relationships with your friends and support you, especially when you are feeling worried, anxious or sad
- support you to develop skills you will need as an adult, like cooking healthy food, managing your money and washing your clothes

Please tell us if these promises are not being kept, or if someone who cares for you or supports you has done an amazing job keeping these promises. Eifion Price, Assistant Director, on 01275 884 392 or email eifion.price@n-somerset.gov.uk



Sheila Smith

Sheila Smith
Director of People and Communities

Donald Davies

Cllr Donald Davies
Leader of the Council

Jo Walker

Jo Walker
Chief Executive
North Somerset Council

Catherine Gibbons

Cllr Catherine Gibbons
Executive Member

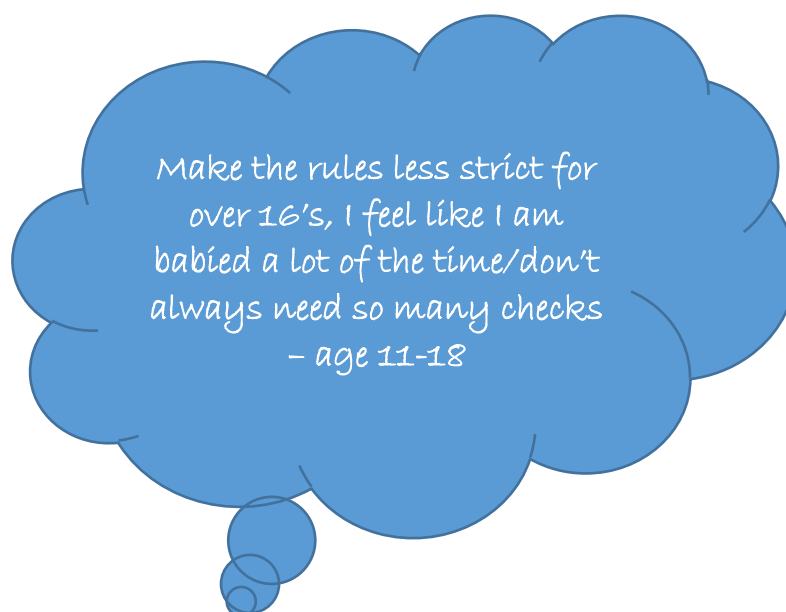
Tim Snoden

Cllr Tim Snoden
Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel

Members, officers and staff must familiarise themselves with these commitments and take the chance, when given the opportunity, to meet with our young people, e.g. at the annual awards ceremony for children looked after, when invited to Ambitious Voice or Unite meetings, at any of the events held during care leavers week or the care leavers awards evening etc.

In addition, there are recruitment and celebration events for foster families, to show our appreciation of all carers do for our most vulnerable children in North Somerset. Elected

member attendance at these events can provide encouragement for children looked after, care leavers and foster families and demonstrate to them the commitment of elected members to their Corporate Parenting role.



10. Some examples of how senior leaders and councillors may champion Corporate Parenting (from Applying Corporate Parenting Principles, DFE)

- Lead members and senior officers promote the idea that looked after children and care leavers are part of the local authority 'family'.
- Members of Children in Care Councils (CiCCs) have regular and positive contact with senior managers and the lead member for children, who know them well. CiCC members are part of the selection process for senior staff in the local authority and in the design of an annual questionnaire about services for looked after children and care leavers.
- Senior officers and councillors demonstrate that they care about what happens to their looked after children and care leavers by taking their Corporate Parenting role seriously. For example, by visiting their looked after children and care leavers who are placed outside or are living outside of the local authority.
- Services and practice change as a result of the views of care leavers. One local authority acted on their views by making changes to the job descriptions of personal advisers (PA) to emphasise their role in encouraging aspirations and getting to know each care leaver well. PA support is now available during weekday evenings.
- A number of local authorities have a yearly takeover day or week for looked after children who make presentations to the senior management team and social workers on their experiences of being in care and what they would do if they took over.
- One local authority has appointed a Young Director, an apprenticeship for a care leaver, who mirrors the work of the Director of Children's Services. The Young Director engages with staff at all levels to ensure the views of looked after children and young people are at

the heart of the work the local authority does. The local authority has a programme of participation activities in place that ensures young people feel like they are driving the quality of the service they receive.

11. Useful resources / additional information

LGA Resource Pack for Corporate Parenting

https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/15.11%20Corporate%20parenting_v05.pdf

National Children's Bureau Corporate Parenting Tool Kit 2013

https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/corporate_parents%20toolkit.pdf

Applying Corporate Parenting Principles

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-corporate-parenting-principles-to-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers>

HM Government Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence July 2016

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf

Centre for Public Scrutiny Safeguarding Children: A Practical Guide for Overview and Scrutiny Councillors June 2016

<https://www.cfps.org.uk/safeguarding-children-practical-guide-os-councillors/>

Department for Education Special Guardianship Guidance January 2017

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/656593/Special_guardianship_statutory_guidance.pdf

Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children Statutory guidance for local authorities February 2018

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf

Framework, evaluation criteria for Ofsted Inspections of local authority children's services

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/851935/Framework_evaluation_criteria_and_inspector_guidance_for_the_inspection_of_local_authority_children_s_services.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-corporate-parenting-principles-to-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers>