

North Somerset Children's Services

Corporate Parenting Strategy

March 2023 - 2026



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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. 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.

Introduction

Welcome to North Somerset Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023 – 2026.

In February 2018, the Department for Education published [Statutory Guidance](#) for Local Authorities applying Corporate Parenting Principles for children in their care and care leavers. As corporate parents elected members and council officers have a statutory responsibility for the wellbeing of children in care and care experienced young people.

'A strong corporate parenting ethos means that everyone from the Chief Executive down to front line staff, as well as elected council members, are concerned about those children and care leavers as if they were their own. This is evidenced by an embedded culture where council officers do all that is reasonably possible to ensure the council is the best 'parent' it can be to the child or young person.'

(Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers Statutory guidance for local authorities February 2018)

Our strategy demonstrates North Somerset Council's and its partners (including Health, Police, and voluntary organisations) commitment to ensuring that the life chances of every child and young person in our care are improved to match their peers. This requires us all to be strong advocates to ensure our children and young people's needs are met in the best way possible.

It is our responsibility to make sure that our children and young people for whom we are responsible feel safe and secure, have stability in their lives, and that they are supported to achieve their full potential and fulfil their ambitions and aspirations.

When providing a service for our children and young people in care we should always challenge ourselves by asking, **'would this be good enough for my child?'**

We are accountable for the delivery of this Corporate Parenting Strategy to:

- Care Leavers Forum
- Children in Care Council
- North Somerset Corporate Parenting Board
- North Somerset Children and Young People's Partnership Board
- North Somerset Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel
- North Somerset Full Council

This strategy sits alongside a range of other documents that detail our shared aim to improve provision for children in care and care experienced young people including:

- Mental Health Strategy for children in care and care experienced young people
- Our Promise to children in care and care experienced young people
- Local Offer to our care experienced young people
- Financial entitlements for our care experienced young people
- Children's Support and Safeguarding Service Plan
- Fostering Sufficiency Strategy

- Joint housing protocol
- Education Strategy
- Corporate Plan
- Participation Strategy

Our preferred terminology is care-experienced child or young person as this is what young people have told us they prefer and encompasses children and young people at every stage of their journey.

What is Corporate Parenting, and who is a Corporate Parent?

When a child or young person cannot live with their birth family and comes into our care, we take on responsibility; this is referred to as 'Corporate Parenting' and is the term used to describe the responsibility of local authorities towards children in care and care experienced young people who have experienced our care.

Corporate Parenting emphasises the collective responsibility of the local authority and its partners to be 'good parents' for all children in care and young people who have experienced our care.

Corporate Parenting is not the sole responsibility of the children's social work services. It is the responsibility of the whole council including every department including elected members, and other agencies who work with children in care and care experienced young people. This could include teachers, GP's, police, health, etc.

Elected members have a responsibility to be champions for our children in care and care experienced young people and ensure that they have the services they need whilst holding officers and partners to account.

Corporate Parenting Principles

To thrive, children in care and care experienced young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. When applying corporate parenting principles to children in care and care experienced young people the statutory guidance sets out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to children in care and care experienced young people.

The seven principles are as follows:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
- to encourage those children in care and care experienced young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- to consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children in care and care experienced young people

Our Promise

We have made a promise based on what children in our care have told us is important to them through the Your Life Your Care survey. We ask our children to complete this survey each year.

North Somerset Council's Promise

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

- find homes for you, where you feel safe and settled
- 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
- 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.

Claire Shiels, Director of Children's Services, 01934 888 891.



Claire Shiels

Claire Shiels
Director of Children's
Services

Mike Bell

Cllr Mike Bell
Leader of the Council

Jo Walker

Jo Walker
Chief Executive
North Somerset Council

Catherine Gibbons

Cllr Catherine Gibbons
Deputy Leader of the Council
and Executive Member for
Children's Services

Our Priorities for improving outcomes for children in care and care experienced young people are set out below

To ensure that everyone is focused on the same goals and making the best of the resources we have, we are going to concentrate on five key areas:

Area 1 - Listening and responding to our children in care and care leavers

Area 2 - Making sure that children in care and care experienced young people have good, safe places to live with secure support

Area 3 - Working to help our children in care and care experienced young people achieve the best they can in all educational opportunities

Area 4 - Making sure children in care and care experienced young people are happy, healthy, and supported with their physical and emotional wellbeing

Area 5 – Provide support to children in care and care experienced young people into independence

Area 1 – Listening and responding to our children in care and care experienced young people

Vision

We will work in partnership with children, young people, and care experienced young people to ensure they have a voice and influence over the review, design, delivery and of the services that are provided to them.

Children in care and care experienced young people will be supported to express their views, wishes and feelings and their views, wishes and feelings are considered when decisions are made that affect their lives.

Children and Young People have told us through the *Your Life, Your Care* survey:

- “Being listened to more”
- “Felt I could have been helped to prepare better – helped managing my money etc”
- “Let the foster carer make some decisions so it feels more natural, like a proper family”
- “Nothing I am happy with the way things are”
- “I like being in care”
- “In the past I didn’t feel included in decision making but I do now”

Our goal:

- To develop a range of approaches that enable children, young people, and care experienced young people to work in partnership with senior leaders and services to influence priorities, policy, and practice
- To support staff to improve their skills and confidence in finding ways to help children in care and care experienced young people express their views, wishes and feelings, and have an influence in decisions which affect their lives

We will:

- Find trusted carers to support any concerns and celebrate all successes
- Ensure children and young people spend time with their families
- Promote positive relationships between children and young people and their social workers
- Always seek the child's voice when decisions are made, putting their wishes and feelings first at every possible step
- Make sure children and young people are trusted with opportunities at home, in school, and in their reviews, and are offered support if things go wrong
- Offer an advocate to help speak on behalf of children and young people who return from being missing
- Ensure young people are represented at our corporate parenting panel and are supported to attend
- Continue developing children in care council and care experienced young people's forum meetings, giving young people the opportunity to share their experiences and inspire changes in our service
- Offer a drop-in service for care experienced young people, where they can attend and discuss anything they wish to or get support for a specific issue
- Use the Mind Of My Own communication tool to make it easier to share, read, reply, and respond to the views of children and young people
- Make sure children and young people have access to written information and advice which helps them understand our roles and responsibilities
- Use the Your Life Your Care and Your Life Beyond Care Bright Spots surveys every year to gather views about how children and young people feel about their care, life, home, education, and wellbeing
- Ensure that care experienced young people are involved in the recruitment of senior social care staff
- Invest in and support a Young Directors post to champion the voice and rights of children in care and care experienced young people
- Be compassionate in how we talk about and record meaningful information about children, young people, and their families using language that cares

What will we see if our plans are working?

- A regular well attended children in care council and care experienced young people's forum
- A high level of positive feedback within the annual Your Life, Your Care surveys
- Regular, high-quality meetings between children in care and professionals that support them including social workers, teachers, and health professionals
- Young people's voice is clear and considered within reviews and personal education planning (PEP) meetings
- An increase in the use of advocacy
- Children in care and care experienced young people attending corporate parenting panels

- Corporate parents seeking children in care and care experienced young people's views on topics within their agendas
- A highly advertised drop-in service, leading to a high attendance and uptake in the service
- Every child in care and care experienced young person having a mind of my own profile, linked with their relevant professionals.

Area 2 – Making sure that children in care and care experienced young people have good, safe places to live with secure support

Vision:

All children in care and care experienced young people have homes, where they feel safe, settled, and have everything they need.

We will continue to develop and grow our Mockingbird model of care. We are proud to be part of this innovative, extended family model that provides respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities.

Wherever possible, children and young people will remain local to North Somerset.

Children and Young People have told us through the *Your Life, Your Care* survey:

- "I feel happy and safe"
- "It's a nice area with nice people"
- "For the time being I'm OK to live where I do"
- "It's quiet so it's not too bad"
- "Supported house, I know I can always talk to someone who can help"
- "It's alright it's a house close to university, private landlord, all right housemates"
- "It's only temporary and I don't know where I'm going next"

Our Goal:

- To increase the number of local foster carers
- Increase the number of children and young people who have permanence at the earliest stage possible
- Continue to develop housing options for all care experienced young people

We will:

- Find caring homes for children and young people where they feel a sense of belonging and have everything they need, including their own space
- Have an up-to-date Permanence Strategy to ensure that every child in care has a clear plan for permanence by the second child in care review and there is evidence that all permanence options are considered
- Have a clear plan to ensure we have homes that will meet needs in North Somerset including recruiting foster carers across all North Somerset, helping us match children and young people with the best carers for their needs

- Explore all options to make sure that children and young people are placed with the best carer for their specific needs and wishes. This can include special guardianship orders, kinship carers, and foster carers
- Explore housing options for all care experienced young people, to ensure they can have a home that can meet their needs
- Try our hardest to help children and young people remain in the North Somerset area
- Recruit more supporting lodgings carers, and increase our 'staying put' offer providing support for young people nearly ready to live independently
- Provide support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children including a home that meets their needs and information explaining their rights as a child in care and care leaver
- Support children and young people and their carers to help ensure their home remains stable

What will we see if our plans are working?

- An increased number of foster carers, spread out to cover the whole of North Somerset, including rural areas and villages
- An increased recruitment uptake for supported lodgings hosts and staying put provision.
- A clear housing pathway with care experienced young people's input.
- Opportunities for care experienced young people to rent privately if there is a lack of local social housing.
- A reduction in our young people living outside the borders of North Somerset.
- Positive feedback within the "your life, your care" survey, "your life beyond care" survey and communication apps.
- Positive feedback from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and care experienced young people to confirm that they feel safe and listened to and understand their rights.

Area 3 – Working to help our children in care and care experienced young people achieve the best they can in all educational opportunities

Vision:

Championing a culture of high aspirations for all our children in care and previously looked after children, raising the educational attainment, and reducing any existing progress learning gaps.

Children and Young People have told us through the *Your Life, Your Care* survey:

- 93% of children liked school
- 93% of children aged 8-11 and 100% of young people aged 11-18 recorded that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education all, most of the time or sometimes
- "Different schools – smaller and more support"
- "I'm not working and its hard to get a job"
- "Feel proud with Uni grades and how much I've achieved – my own business"

- “I really like all the toys I have at my carer’s house”

Our Goal:

- To raise educational attainment across the broad curriculum; and in doing so to reduce any existing progress gaps between our children in care and previously children in care and their peers

We Will:

- Ensure social workers work closely with carers and the virtual school to support education and help with homework, learning, college, university, and career options with regular Personal Education Plans to help keep track of progress and any support needed
- Ensure there is a trusted adult at school, college, who offers support and encouragement
- Ensure the voice of young people is clear and evident in personal education plans so they experience a sense of agency and investment in their learning journey
- Allocate a worker to provide young people with support getting into education, employment, or training if they are not already attending
- Offer work experience, traineeships, and apprenticeships within North Somerset Council for children in care or care experienced young people
- Offer improved support and guidance for young people wishing to attend university
- Offer support to young people wishing to pursue career goals e.g. through the Next Steps Panel
- Enable young people to transition to care leaver status, adulthood, and independence with secure Employment, Education and Training outcomes and pathways that reflect their potential
- Ensure that children with SEND receive additional support to reach their potential
- Ensure that the number of young people who are engaged in Education, Employment, and Training increases each year

What will we see if our plans are working?

- The designated teacher at your school will be up to date with all relevant training
- High quality and consistent personal education plans (PEPs)
- A sufficient level of support for young people not in education, employment or training, and those clear pathways are in place
- Positive feedback within the ‘your life’, ‘your care survey’, ‘your life beyond care’ survey and communication apps like Mind of My own
- Multiple successful apprenticeship placements within North Somerset Council for our care experienced young people and children in care
- Up to date Higher Education (HE) Policy for care experienced young people, with new financial packages for those progressing to Master’s courses
- Successful offer of a mentor for all care experienced young people in higher education

- Improved educational outcomes and a narrowing the attainment gap for all children in care and care experienced young people
- Increased numbers of care experienced young people attending higher education
- Increased numbers of children in care and care experienced young people in education, employment, and training

Area 4 – Making sure children in care and care experienced young people are happy, healthy, and supported with their physical and emotional wellbeing

Vision:

We want our children to be happy and healthy both physically and emotionally, to be safe and protected from harm and exploitation. We want them to be supported to become successful independent adults who can thrive, manage their own health needs, seek support when needed and be able to achieve their potential in life.

We will ensure that all children in care and care experienced young people are supported to improve their health and wellbeing and are able to access health services of a high standard to support their needs including their physical, mental, and sexual health.

Children and Young People have told us through the *Your Life, Your Care* survey:

- “Feel comfortable about the way I look, added some weight on, feel confident in certain outfits”
- “I used to love skiing when in foster care, but I can’t afford it now”
- “Lockdown - Other than that I enjoy swimming, any sports, gaming. I can honestly be interested in anything as long as people to do it with”
- “COVID-19 stops everything. I wish there were things still around that could help with social anxiety. Meeting people similar to me would help”
- “Daughter is walking now – want to take her to the park and to other places – Pepper Pig world”
- “Seeing mum, dad, brothers, and sisters more”

Our Goal:

- All staff working with our children in care and care experienced young people understand the impact of trauma and work with children and young people to promote healing and support our children and young people to be able to cope with the pressures life brings
- Ensure that social workers help young people understand why they are not living with their parents
- Make sure that they have opportunities to have fun, spend time on their hobbies and explore the outdoors
- Help young people with relationships, especially if they are worried, anxious, or sad
- Provide cultural identity and awareness training to professionals

- Support young people with their mental health, and help them overcome past traumas or experiences
- Develop a joint strategy with local Child and Adult Mental Health Service partners to improve mental health provisions for children in care and care experienced young people
- Ensuring that all children in care and care experienced young people have a health assessment, and ensure all immunisations and dental checks are up to date

We Will:

- Maintain effective communication using our communication apps
- Implement a clear process to access funding for children in care and care experienced young people to continue their hobbies
- Ensure young people feel their culture is understood and respected
- Provide robust provisions for mental health support, with easy access for all children in care and care experienced young people that require it
- Make sure there are opportunities to have fun, spend time on hobbies and explore the outdoors
- Monitor emotional wellbeing through regular completion of a strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) and provide support where needed
- Ensure care experienced young people have access to services that meet their needs, including mental and emotional health, sexual health, pre and postnatal health care services, etc.
- Ensure all care experienced young people have access to a gym membership
- Have clear pathways of support available for children in care and care experienced young people moving to adult services

What will we see if our plans are working?

- All children in care and care experienced young people have a completed health assessment and are fully immunised (where appropriate)
- All children in care and care experienced young people receive a completed health passport when they turn 18
- All children in care and care experienced young people fully understand their care plans and life story
- High uptake of children and young people using MOMO
- Positive feedback from young people in the *Your Life, Your Care* survey and *Your Life Beyond Care* survey
- 100% Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) completion
- Sufficiently available, high-quality mental health support, with easy access for all children in care and care experienced young people that require it

Area 5 - Supporting children in care and care experienced young people into adult lives

Vision

Young people will be successfully supported from care to independence with a high standard of care from a range of partners. Corporate parenting responsibilities will be understood by

all North Somerset Council partners and the Care Leaver Offer will clearly lay out what support or service care experienced young people are entitled to.

The government report 'Keep on Caring 2016' identifies 5 key outcomes for young people leaving care as:

- All young people leaving care should be better prepared and supported to live independently
- Improved access to education, employment, and training
- Care experienced young people should experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure
- Improved access to health support
- Care experienced young people should achieve financial stability

Children and Young People have told us through the *Your Life, Your Care* survey:

- "He's really good, always checks up on me, he's good at his job, I'm happy I have him as my care worker"
- "He's amazing"
- "She's awesome, very supportive"
- "Without her support I wouldn't be where I am now. She knows how I interpret things, often the wrong way, and has always been there to help by explaining in a way I understand"

Our Goal:

- A robust transitions process which supports young people from Children's Services to Adult's and ensures young people are involved at every stage
- Young people are supported through education and employment so all can access college, university, apprenticeships, and jobs
- Young people feel they understand their rights and are confident their voice will be heard when key decisions are made
- Support for independent living, learning new skills, socialising, developing hobbies, and making decision
- Maintaining the health and wellbeing our children in care and care experienced young people

We will:

- Support with skills to transition into adulthood, like cooking healthy food, managing money, organising transport, etc.
- Help with independent living skills
- Train foster carers to support children and young people with independent living skills
- Link young people to a leaving care Personal Adviser (PA) at age 16, who will work alongside them and their social worker to help explore options when they are ready to leave care

- Ensure that all children in care and care experienced young people have a bank account, provisional driving licence, valid passport, Application Registration Card (ARC)
- Support asylum seeking children in care and care experienced young people to access legal help and ensure they understand their rights.

What will we see if our plans are working?

- All foster carers that care for teenagers will have support and training to help promote independence.
- All 16-year-old children in care have links with a leaving care personal adviser
- All children and young people to have a bank account, provisional driving licence, valid passport, and Application Registration Card (ARC)
- Every child in care aged 15+ to have a clear plan regarding leaving care.
- Every pathway plan is written with the young person using language that cares
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have support to access legal help and know their rights

Governance Arrangements

The Corporate Parenting Board provides the strategic partnership to oversee our arrangements for ensuring that children who are looked after by North Somerset Council, and those adults previously looked after, achieve the best possible outcomes. The Board is made up of elected members, key service leaders and service providers including council officers and representatives from wider public services.

The Corporate Parenting Board provides a leadership role by championing the specific needs of children and young people who are, or have been, looked after by the local authority. It does this through working with all elected members, officers within the Council, with colleagues from partner agencies and with children and young people. This is done by overseeing the work undertaken in specific services to ensure a corporate approach is being taken from a range of Council departments and agencies and ensure that the services support children that are or have been looked after to have the full benefit of the widest possible resources to support successful outcomes.

Democratic Involvement and Accountability

The Corporate Parenting Board can refer matters for, and provide information to, the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Panel. Key reports will also be shared with the Children and Young People's Partnership Board. Each Full Council meeting includes a report on Corporate Parenting.

Participation of Children and Young People

The voice of children and young people will be a consistent and influential feature of the Corporate Parenting Board. Participation will be steered through the Care Leavers Forum and the Children in Care Council. The Young Director and representatives from the Care

Leavers Forum have an open invitation to the Board as board members. We hold three themed corporate parenting sessions per year all of which are an open invitation for any care experienced young person with the agenda being set by the young people.

The Head of Service will meet at least three times a year with both the Care Leavers Forum and Children in Care Council to share progress and discuss priorities.

