



# Corporate Parenting Board – Annual Report 2022/23

Report for Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) December 2022

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# Foreword

As chair of Stockton on Tees Corporate Parenting Board I am pleased to introduce the 2022 Annual Report.

During the last year, the Corporate Parenting Board has continued to deliver the significant changes needed as we progress on our improvement journey. As a Board we have sought to understand the lived experiences of Children in our Care and Care Leavers, to ensure that they are safe, healthy and leading happy and fulfilling lives

Feedback from children and young people, particularly through our Children in Care Council and Lets Take Action group has had an essential role in shaping what we do, the priorities of the Board and how we tackle challenges and embed improvements into practice.

The Board is comprised of Members and Officers dedicated to improving the lives of children and young people and keeping us focused on the lived experiences of children in care and Care Leavers. I would like to thank them for their help and commitment to the work of the Board and their commitment as Corporate Parents.

The annual report provides a summary of the business of the Board and includes an overview of the themes we have focused on throughout 2022, the core values we bring to our work and the progress made against our Children in Care and Care Leavers action plan.



**Councilor Barbara Inman**

# What is Corporate Parenting in Stockton-on-Tees?

The Corporate Parenting Board is an advisory body which provides leadership and a governance structure for corporate parenting in order to drive forward positive outcomes for Children in Our Care and Care Leavers. It oversees our Children in care and care leavers action plan and promotes our pledges. It also provides challenge and scrutiny to ensure that the best outcomes are achieved for Children in our Care and Care Leavers.

## How does it work?

The Corporate Parenting Board meet bimonthly, and since the pandemic has reverted back to face-to-face meetings. Board meetings were held on the following dates:

- 2 July 2021
- 6 August 2021
- 8 October 2021
- 10 December 2021
- 11 February 2022
- 8 April 2022
- 10 June 2022
- 12 August 2022
- 7 October 2022

## The Corporate Parenting Board has the following aims, objectives and vision:

To be the best corporate parents we can be, working together to provide Children in our Care and Care Leavers with happy and healthy childhoods, helping them reach and exceed their full potential and aspirations and supporting them into successful adulthood.

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is to enquire and understand, set ambition and to champion and challenge our collective care of Children looked after and Care Leavers. This is an assurance role that sits alongside multi agency operational work and organisational scrutiny. It is informed by our experts, our practitioners, children and young people and carers.

The commitments we pledge to help us realise our aims, objectives and vision:

- To make sure that the whole council and relevant partner agencies commit to excellent standards of corporate parenting.
- To seek improved long-term outcomes for Children in Care and their families – for their happiness, well-being, educational success and future prospects.
- To promote stability for all Children in Care.
- To ensure that the voice of Children in Care and Care Leavers is heard and influences both the services and the policies that we deliver.

- To scrutinise, monitor and oversee key performance indicators in relation to health, education and well-being.
- To ensure that all relevant strategies, plans and resources identify and are explicit about the contribution that they make to targets agreed for improvement.
- To consider the outcomes of inspections and regulatory visits based on provision for Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- To receive regular reports on provisions for leaving care, housing and training for Care Leavers.
- To monitor the work of our Adoption and Fostering services.
- To support work experience schemes.
- To celebrate the achievements of Children in our Care, Care Leavers and their carers.
- Undertake a programme of visits and listen to feedback from Board Members to ensure that provision is appropriate and effective.
- Ensure that Children in our Care and Care Leavers are offered access to advocacy.

We have always taken the view that Corporate Parenting is best achieved across the extended family – working with our partners. However, there are specific duties on the Council which we must fulfil:

The Children and Social Work Act (2017) defined for the first time in law the responsibility of corporate parents to ensure, as far as possible, secure, nurturing and positive experiences for Children in Care and Care leavers. This requires the Council to have regard to a set of Corporate Parenting principles when exercising its functions in relation to looked after Children and Care Leavers (former relevant children):

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of Children and Young People
- To encourage Children and Young People to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of Children and Young People.
- To help Children and Young People gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the Local Authority and its relevant partners.
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for Children and Young People.
- For Children and Young People to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- To prepare Children and Young People for adulthood and independent living.

Under the Children Act (2004), Local Authorities have a duty to promote cooperation between ‘relevant partners’, including the Police, the NHS and Education providers, while those partners have a duty to cooperate, in turn, with the Local Authority. Guidance in the act highlights that Corporate Parenting is a ‘task that must be shared by the whole Local Authority and partner agencies’.

We are determined to ensure that the needs of our Children in Care and Care Leavers are given the highest priority and that they are valued and cared about, not only by those who look after them on a daily basis, but also by those who make decisions politically, corporately and operationally.

### **This means...**

- That we will work to deliver the priorities in our Children in our Care and Care Leavers action plan, and that we will be open and honest about progress.
- That we want to do more than deliver what we have to. We recognise the many individual and organisational ways in which we can achieve more than the service or thematic roles stipulate as defined in our priorities.
- Elected Members of the Council will be clear about their roles, and the actions they can take to be good Corporate Parents
- That Senior Officers in the Council will go above and beyond their roles to achieve the best for Children in our Care and Care Leavers, using their personal authority and resources to achieve this.
- That all of our Partners in the Borough will take their Corporate Parenting role seriously, and will commit to do the best they can, as part of an extended family
- That all Officers of the Council are clear about what they can do to contribute.

### **The Corporate Parenting Board met nine times in 2021/2022 and considered the following reports:**

1. Adoption Tees Valley (6 monthly).
2. Data and Analysis (6 monthly).
3. Virtual School update (6 monthly).
4. CIOCSG update (Bi-monthly).
5. Out of area placements – An overview of support.
6. Out of area placements – An overview of support during COVID.
7. Monitoring arrangements of external registered Children's Homes.
8. Mockingbird Project.
9. Independent Review Unit annual report.
10. Performance report for 'Our Place'/Edge of Care services.
11. ILACS OFSTED 2-day Focused visit (December 2021) – 'Early Permanence and Care Planning'.
12. Accommodation update.
13. Fostering panel and Fostering service report.
14. Post 16 and Care Leavers support and accommodation report.
15. CIOC and Care Leavers Strategy.
16. CIOC and Care Leavers Action Plan.

### **Children in our Care Strategic Group (CIOCSG)**

The CIOCSG is accountable to the Stockton on Tees Corporate Parenting Board and Stockton on Tees Council Cabinet. Throughout the last year the group has continued to meet regularly with bespoke pieces of work identified for further exploration. The CIOCSG is a stakeholder group, overseeing the priorities of the Children in our Care and Care Leavers action plan.

# Our Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy

It was agreed with the Corporate Parenting Board members last year that our Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy (2018-2021) would not be immediately updated and that the Children in our Care and Care Leavers action plan would be the strategic document to set out our vision and actions for how the Council and our partners will support Children who are in our Care and our Care Leavers to achieve the best possible outcomes in their lives.

At a time when all Children and Young People face huge personal, social, and economical challenges we know that Children in our Care and Care Leavers can face significant additional obstacles as they grow up and move towards independence and adult life. We also know from experience that with the right support, encouragement, love and nurturing, children who have come through our care system can make an invaluable and unique contribution to all aspects of society, our culture, our economy and our communities.

It is our responsibility as Corporate Parents to create the conditions for these Children and Young People to thrive and excel in their lives. We plan to refresh our Children in Our Care and Care Leavers Strategy for the period 2023-2027 next year. We are confident that the delivery of the priorities set out in our Children in Our Care and Care Leavers action plan and the refreshed strategy will deliver progressively improving outcomes for our Children and Young People.

## What have we done in 2021/22?

The Corporate Parenting Board have continued to support our vision for Children in our Care and Care Leavers to create a home and community environment that provides every Child and Young Person with a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to meet their full potential. Our aim continues to be to support Children to remain within their birth families where it is safe to do so, look after them for as short a time as possible, move them only when it is in their best interests to do so and to support them within their local community.

The five key priorities from our Children in Care and Care Leavers action plan have helped focus and steer our work throughout the last year:

### Priority 1

We will always be informed by the views, voices and opinions of care experienced children and young people

- Our 'Lets Action group' are now involved in the development of a co-production participation Strategy with a much stronger move towards engagement and collaboration.
- Existing contracts and documents have been reviewed to ensure that the voice of the Child is captured and incorporated into contracting routes.
- A practice week was held in October 2022 which included feedback from Children and Young People.

- Children in our Care and Care Leavers are part of a group working on the redesign of our complaints documents.
- Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) now meet with all Children in our Care outside of their formal statutory reviews to capture their voice, hear their views and take forward ideas to inform service delivery.
- Training is provided for all staff in relation to capturing the child's voice with Community Care Inform offering additional training which includes support around life story work.
- We have recently extended our contract with NYAS to ensure that every Child in our Care and Care Leaver has access to an advocate who can act/speak on their behalf.

## Priority 2

### Improve Outcomes and Life chances, with focus on:

#### Education and Training

- Retraining of partners and the workforce has been undertaken to improve further opportunities for Care Leavers.
- Exploration of national and local initiatives for employees and employers via regional workstreams has been undertaken. Focus has been on improving work experience opportunities.
- A refinement of the previous approach and commitment to supporting Children in our Care and Care Leavers, which included transitions from pre to post 18 services.
- In order to support the closing of the gap between Children in our Care and Care Leavers, additional resources have been identified within our Virtual School (VS).
- All communication documents have been designed and are now in place.
- A named Virtual School member has been appointed to lead on the extended duties of the Virtual School with a data plan designed to support tracking of outcomes.
- Improved understanding of what trauma Informed practice is by rolling out introductory offers in all of our schools.
- Documents detailing our vision and plans for implementation of next steps have been shared with schools.
- Good Practice Hubs now identified to share high quality practice.
- Compassionate Stockton Trauma informed programmes network held, with a working group set up to provide direction.
- Two Family Thrive Programmes for Stockton Carers have been delivered.
- SDQ's were completed as part of the Spring 2022 term PEP with a development plan of how the Virtual School can use this tool to better support Children in our Care in their education.
- Various training programmes have been developed to support Care leavers to access further education.
- Increased preparation around interview techniques for Care Leavers is being offered via HR.
- Additional resources have been identified with Senior Progressions Workers and a Welfare Officer now in post to support increased numbers of Care Leavers to take advantage of opportunities post 16.
- A working group has been set up to work on managing the transition PEP to Pathway plan to ensure support is seamless.
- Challenge to schools is provided by the Virtual School were a permanent exclusion of a Child in our Care is likely.



- Improved analysis of exclusion data is now available to ensure that those Children in our Care highlighted as being a potential for exclusion are identified earlier and planned interventions are offered as early as possible.
- Analysis of data is now available to better understand the links, themes and patterns between Children in our Care who are missing from education and who are also missing from home or care.
- In order to improve the health of Children in our Care and Care Leavers, a review of our existing contracts has been undertaken to improve services.
- Training has been rolled out to Education and Social Care staff to improve understanding and quality of SDQ's
- Children in our Care and Care Leavers are provided with passes to access Tees Active Leisure. Children's care plans now have increased focus on a child's interests, hobbies and talents with an emphasis on offering further opportunities within the community.
- Children in our Care and Care Leavers (where age appropriate) now engage with evidence based, preventative sexual health education.
- Work has commenced in engaging schools in a 'whole school' approach to emotional health and wellbeing.
- ICB (formally CCG) have reviewed their current contract with a renewed focus on learning from health assessments so services can target patterns. All review health assessments are now undertaken by HDFT.
- New dental health pathways have been launched. All those Children in our Care and Care Leavers who have been unable to access dental care through their usual practice can now access through a nominated practice
- New Immunisation pathways have been introduced. Any Child in our Care or Care Leaver whose review health assessment is out of date will be visited at home/placement to ensure regular oversight and any health needs are identified and responded to.
- In relation to cultural experiences, we have further developed our 'More Stuff like this Please' model with our lead cultural partner ARC. A number of Children in our Care and Care Leavers were part of a group overseeing this development.
- A 10k contribution by the Council, match funded by ARC, has resulted in a wider range of activities being offered to Children and Young People.
- Our Hartlepool and Stockton Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSSCP) has developed and rolled out training for all staff with particular focus on raising awareness around culture, faith, religion and ethnicity.

### Priority 3

#### Seek to keep families together and close to their communities

- Work is underway to design a refreshed Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy with an external consultant brought in to support with ideas.
- Work is underway to design a Placement Strategy so aims, objectives and actions are clearly set out.
- Our Residential Children's Homes programme was shared with Cabinet in January 2022. Proposal agreed with the primary aim to increase internal, less costly placements, and maintain Children within their own communities.
- Work has commenced in relation to a Capital Bid.

- Work is ongoing with our Joint Venture (Spark of Genius) to develop a further medium to long term 4/5 bedded home.
- The Mockingbird model is under development.
- Our Foster Carers offer has been refreshed.
- Increased resources have been identified within our Fostering Service to support training, recruitment and retention of Foster Carers.
- Improved and more focussed data is now produced with 6 key measures now shared 2 x annually at the Corporate Parenting Board.
- In respect of early permanence planning a 'Babies at risk of being born into care' support package and practice guidance have now been developed.
- Our contract with PAUSE was extended for a further year.
- Our procedures around Regulation 24 assessments (temporary approval of foster carers) have been refreshed and embedded into practice. Briefing sessions have been held with staff to ensure assessments are focussed and Timely.
- All care plans for permanence are scrutinised by a senior manager at our PLO/Care Planning panels to ensure plans are appropriate, all options have been considered and permanence is considered in a timely way.
- We have increased our offer around Special Guardianship Orders so that these carers receive the same support as a Foster Carer does.
- Work is ongoing to design/redesign and procure new therapeutic provision for Children in Care or on the Edge of Care. A design programme for therapeutic approaches is being undertaken to raise awareness/increase knowledge of staff around appropriate models of working.
- Work is ongoing to develop our 'Edge of Care' model further, to include 3 smaller HUBS to work alongside our 'Turnaround Home'.
- A new reunification team has been developed to work alongside families to support children to remain with their family of origin.
- Our new Contextual Safeguarding approach has now been implemented, working alongside our new Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) team to identify and support those children at risk of exploitation and extra familiar harm.

#### Priority 4

##### Develop and communicate our vision, embed our Approach and Intent:

- A new Children in our Care Investment group has been developed to implement a strategy framework to support in reducing our placement overspend by primarily reducing the need for high-cost external residential care.
- A lead person has now been identified and appointed to drive forward our Residential Children's Homes Programme, to increase internal provision – in both Residential and Foster Care, provide greater monitoring and tracking of high-cost placements and ensure the programme meets need and demand.
- A Valuing Care Tool has been implemented to provide improved assessment of the needs in respect of our Children and Young People to support better placement matches.

- A Communication plan is under development to raise awareness and improve communication around our vision/principles and pledge in relation to Children in our Care and Care Leavers. Resource for a Marketing Officer post to support the plan has been identified.
- Briefings are under development to raise the awareness of the responsibilities of the Corporate Parenting Board and Corporate Parenting role.
- Contracts have now been reviewed in relation to the 'Independent Visitors' scheme. A Handbook and training have now been developed.
- Our 'No Limits' group have identified specific roles for Members and Council Officers as Corporate Parents supporting Children in our Care.
- A 'just Giving' intranet web page to explain the giving scheme has now been developed.
- Charitable status has been established with monies held by Tees Community Foundation (TCF) Go Fund Me page set up.
- A task and finish group has been implemented and is developing pathways to move money from Council Employees to DVCF.
- Our Corporate Parenting Fund has been reviewed to ensure that Children in our Care and Care leavers are supported in a wider number of creative ways.
- Our Culture, Libraires and Events Directorate have increased their support in developing outdoor celebration events.

## Priority 5

### Improve outcomes for care experienced young people (Care Leavers) by focusing on:

- Our Care Leavers Offer has now been refreshed.
- A new website has been designed which will provide data to inform us of how well the offer is being accessed and what the impact of the offer might be.
- Increased resources have been identified with new Employment Engagement Officers now in post. Work has begun with Employers to help them understand some of the barriers/vulnerabilities that can be faced by Care Leavers.
- Work is ongoing around identifying appropriate accommodation for Care Leavers – this includes supported accommodation, staying close arrangements and semi/independent living opportunities.
- Further work has been undertaken to prevent and reduce homelessness for 16–17-year-olds. An action plan is in place following scrutiny/oversight by the Home Office.
- Additional resources have been identified in order to create new 'Keeping in Touch' workers so that the whereabouts of Care Leavers is better understood ensuring that they are safe, and that their needs are being met.
- All of our wider therapeutic services have now been aligned with additional resources being identified in order to appoint a Psychologist to ensure that Care Leavers have improved access to health services and therapies.
- Awareness raising and training around pathway plans for Care Leavers has been rolled out to staff to improve quality.



## What has been the impact?

- Our numbers of children in Care have gradually decreased over the last 12 months – currently at 560 compared to 582. This despite receiving a higher number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) in a much shorter timeframe under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) than was anticipated (22). However, due to a fragmented market our overspend has increased – primarily as a result of increased costs for external residential placements.
- Our processes and systems developed to welcome Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) has been recognised and subsequently shared with the Northeast Migration Partnership (NEMP) as an area of good practice.
- The increased inclusion of young people in task and finish groups has led to young people sharing that they feel more enthused around the Corporate Parenting role and feel better listened to.
- Our 2-day OFSTED focussed visit in December 2021 – ‘Early Permanence and Care Planning’ found ‘A determined and well established leadership team that has driven progress to secure permanence for children in its care. The development of robust monitoring and tracking mechanisms is preventing delays to achieving timely permanence for most children’.
- We have received positive feedback from the courts, including senior Judges, on the improved quality and robustness of our care plans.
- The work from our Edge of Care service has prevented several children from coming into care. The offer of respite, along with intensive parenting interventions has seen positive change.
- We have secured more proportionate legal orders for some Children and Young People as a direct result of the improved offer around Special Guardianship Orders. This has prevented some children from becoming the subject of Interim Care Orders or Care Orders solely for financial reasons.
- We have been very successful in maintaining a high proportion of children with kinship carers – 25% of Children in Care are placed with Kinship Carers – nearly double the national rate.
- Audits undertaken in relation to Unborn Babies where proceedings had been initiated upon birth evidenced improved practice: The risks were clearly identified and understood, and proceedings could not have been prevented.
- Our PAUSE project has used innovative and creative approaches to engage and maintain high quality relationships with women who have experienced repeated removals of children from their care. 4 women are currently working with the programme, the maximum number of places available.
- Audits undertaken in relation to Regulation 24 placements demonstrates that learning from Inspections is well understood and is now embedded in practice.
- Feedback from the Ministry of Housing in relation to our homeless 16/17-year-olds was extremely positive with our protocol around Care Leavers and Housing being highly praised. This is to be shared nationally as an example of good practice.
- A scrutiny review into Education, Employment and Training (EET) for Care Leavers has evidenced improvements in the rate in which Care Leavers are in EET.
- We currently have 28 Care Leavers who attend university with two of these Young People having recently commenced their master’s.
- We have seen an increase in Care Leavers being offered apprentices and work experience within the Council.

- There are 20% of children attending Children in Our Care review meetings, but a much larger percentage (over 80%) are having their views heard through written submissions or via advocates.
- We are seeing an increase in the completion of SDQ's which has supported a better understanding of a Child's and Carers needs.
- Our Let's Take Action (LTA) group have increased their involvement in projects and have inputted into the design and service delivery of Foster Carer training, researching the design and selecting items for the teenager room in our local commissioned Family Time Centre and creating a list of top tips for Social Workers when working with Children in our Care.

## What are we going to do next?

- We will refresh our Children in Our Care and Care Leavers Strategy for the period 2023-25, building on the Children in our Care and Care Leavers action plan.
- We will develop a Participation Strategy to clarify the purpose, role, need for and importance of the voice of the child to ensure that this is embedded in all that we do and hope to achieve – 'You spoke, we listened'.
- We will Identify what services can be developed; what practice can be changed/influenced by the Child's voice.
- We will Introduce development sessions across all partners to embed the Child's voice within all of our planning.
- We will further Improve Life Story work
- We will strengthen Council commitment to Corporate Parenting.
- We will develop a Marketing Strategy that is clear, precise and easy to access in order to communicate our vision and pledge for Children in our Care and Care Leavers.
- We will further develop the 'No Limits' scheme to enable Council Members and Officers to give their time or make a financial contribution to support Children in our Care and Care Leavers.
- We will design and roll out an improved Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy which will better address Children's and family's needs whilst reducing costs over the coming years.
- We will further shape the delivery of our Residential Homes Programme to ensure that it meets the needs of children, addresses our sufficiency analysis and provides value for money.
- We will maintain more Children within a family setting whenever possible.
- We will seek to keep Children close to their communities and where it is safe to do so look after them for as short a time as possible.
- We will further embed the Mockingbird Model.
- We will ensure that recent improvements in the quality-of-care plans including an improved focus on permanence, is sustained.
- We will ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable Children in our Care and Care Leavers are consistently reviewed in partnership with colleagues.
- We will further embed our Contextual Safeguarding Approach into practice with increased support and intervention being offered for those at risk of exploitation or who go missing.
- We will further develop our action plan to prevent and reduce homelessness for 16/17-year-olds.

- We will further explore the funding and incentives to enable Young People to better access and sustain Employment, Education and Training opportunities.
- We will review our Strategies with Health to ensure that the right support is being offered with the most appropriate partner engagement.
- We will further develop our 'More Stuff Like This Please' model with our lead cultural partner – ARC.

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is to inquire and understand, set ambition and to champion and challenge our collective care and support of Children in our Care and Care Leavers. This is an assurance role that sits alongside multi agency operational work and organisational scrutiny. Throughout the next year we will continue to deliver on our pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers, maintaining oversight of our Corporate Parenting services whilst also focussing on the 5 key priorities as outlined in our Children in Care and Care Leavers action plan.

We know that we will face a number of challenges over the year ahead, particularly in relation to reducing our overspend on placements, but we are committed to tackle these challenges to ensure that we are continuing to drive improvements in the way we support Children and Young People in Stockton on Tees.