

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

DATE 13th February 2026

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD : BUILDING ON PROGRESS

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Corporate Parenting Board is asked to endorse proposals that strengthen its focus, structure and ways of working, following recent progress in embedding lived experience and broadening partner engagement. To support more consistent oversight and drive delivery against the agreed strategic priorities, the proposals include a focused development session, maintaining the current meeting model while strengthening feedback loops from young people led sessions, establishing themed sub-groups aligned to the Corporate Parenting Commitments, and introducing improved performance reporting. Members are also invited to provide feedback on meeting arrangements to address recurring attendance challenges and ensure effective leadership engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Corporate Parenting Board is requested to:

- Endorse the proposal to strengthen the Board's focus, structure and ways of working
- Agree to the delivery of an externally facilitated review session
- Support the continued use of alternating business-focused and young people-led meetings
- Provide feedback on meeting arrangements to inform future scheduling
- Approve the establishment of strategic priority sub-groups, aligned with the Corporate Parenting Commitments, and strengthened reporting arrangements

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1. The Corporate Parenting Board plays a central role in ensuring that the Council and its partners fulfil their collective responsibilities to children in our care and care leavers. As set out in the Council Constitution, the Board's purpose is to provide strategic oversight, celebrate the achievement of children and young people, improve outcomes through sharing good practice, experience and approaches and ensure that the Council and its partners are ambitious, aspirational and responsible corporate parents. It provides a forum for challenge, accountability and co-production, ensuring that decisions made and priorities agreed are informed by the lived experience of children and young people.
2. During Autumn/Winter 2023-24, the Board undertook a self-assessment and a series of development sessions to strengthen focus and effectiveness. This work included

corporate parenting training, delivered by the Local Government Association and offered to all elected members, and culminated in the development of the Corporate Parenting Strategic Priorities and the 'Stockton-on-Tees commitments to all children in our care and care leavers'. These commitments set out the values and behaviours that underpin our approach to corporate parenting and guide the Board's work

3. Since then, the Board has broadened partner organisation attendance, improved engagement with a wider range of SBC services and created more opportunities for young people to share their experiences and contribute to discussions. The introduction of alternating business and young people-led meetings has been a significant step in embedding lived experience within the Board's work.
4. As the Board continues to evolve, there is an opportunity to build on the progress made by refining the structure and focus of the bi-monthly business meetings. This will ensure that the Board remains aligned to best practice and is able to gain strong oversight of outcomes for children in our care and care leavers.
5. Regionally and nationally, high-performing Corporate Parenting Boards have strengthened their arrangements by:
 - Ensuring meeting agendas are closely aligned with strategic priorities
 - Establishing focused sub-groups, aligned with strategic priorities, to drive progress and accountability
 - Involving care-experienced young people as co-chairs or vice-chairs
 - Embedding young people-led panels and/or advisory groups
6. Adopting a similar approach locally could build on the Board's existing strengths whilst improving clarity and focus within business meetings and strengthening the link between strategic priorities and delivery.

PROPOSAL

7. Building on this learning, the following is proposed:
8. Board Development Session

A development session will bring together CPB members, senior officers, partners and care-experienced young people to undertake a self-assessment/stock take reflecting on what is working well, revisiting and reaffirming the agreed strategic priorities and finalising how business meetings and themed sub-groups can best support the Board to drive forward with its ambition and aspirations for children in our care and care leavers. It is intended that the Local Government Association will facilitate the development session.

9. Maintaining and Strengthening the Existing Meeting Structure

The current model of alternating between business-focused and young people-led meetings has been a positive development and reinforces the Board's commitment to co-production and lived experience. However, there is a need to strengthen the planning and preparation for young people-led sessions, ensuring clear feedback loops and tangible outcomes. The mechanism for this will be co-produced with young people but could include for example a "You Said, We Did" tracker which captures issues raised and the Board's response or a bi-monthly 'Impact of Young People's

Voice’ report. This enables the business-focused meetings to be aligned to performance, strategic priorities and accountability.

10. Establishing Strategic Priorities Sub-Groups

Using the strategic priorities previously identified by the Board, a set of focused sub-groups will be developed which will be comprised of cross-departmental council officers and partners, and co-chaired by care experienced young people. These groups will report back progress against an annual delivery plan.

| Strategic Priority | Key areas of work |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Safe and stable homes | Housing pathways, tenancy support, emergency accommodation, bond scheme |
| Education, employment and training | Attainment, NEET reduction, apprenticeships, work placements, training, employment pathways, skills development |
| Connections and community | Life story work, Lifelong Links, cultural identity, celebration of achievement |
| Being heard | Young people-led meetings, feedback loops, co-chairing opportunities, development of Lived Experience panel |
| Healthy lives | Trauma-informed practice, access to mental health support, emotional resilience support, universal health service access |

11. Strengthened Reporting and Oversight

To maintain a strong focus on improving outcomes, it is proposed that quarterly performance updates on key indicators including placement stability, education, employment and training and access to health services are presented to the Board. An annual impact report is also proposed which summarises progress, challenges and priorities for the year ahead.

12. Meeting arrangements

It has been identified that the existing date and time create recurring clashes with other significant statutory and strategic commitments. In particular:

- The Chair has an ongoing clash with a key Combined Authority meeting which has on occasion limited her ability to attend the Board.
- The Director of Children’s Services has a recurring clash with the national Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) strategic meeting, resulting in frequent use of substitute representation.

While appropriate vice-chairing and substitution arrangements are in place, there is a recognised risk that inconsistent attendance by key senior leaders may impact the Board’s effectiveness, leadership visibility, and collective accountability. It is also acknowledged that external scrutiny, including inspection, would reasonably expect regular direct engagement from the Chair and the Director of Children’s Services, given their central roles in corporate parenting.

In addition, some officers and partner organisations have reported similar challenges due to competing commitments. Members and partners are therefore invited to share their views on the current meeting arrangements and any availability constraints that they may have. Feedback received will be used to inform the forthcoming Corporate

Parenting Board development day, where options to strengthen attendance, leadership engagement, and overall board effectiveness will be considered. Comments should be provided at the meeting, or to Michael Henderson (Democratic Services Officer).

13. The above proposals are intended to support the Board to work with greater clarity, consistency and shared purpose. By refining the structure and focus of meetings, introducing themed sub-groups and improving how young people's feedback is captured and acted upon, the Board will be better placed to maintain effective oversight of its strategic priorities. These changes seek to build on the progress already made, reinforce a culture of collective responsibility and ensure that meeting arrangements enable full participation.

NEXT STEPS

14. With agreement from the Board, the following actions are proposed:

- Schedule and deliver the development session
- Confirm the meeting structure and revise the annual forward plan
- Review meeting dates and times following member feedback
- Establish sub-group membership and terms of reference
- Develop the performance reporting framework

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications from this proposal

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

As corporate parents, Local Authorities have a legal duty to actively listen to, engage with and respond to the voices of care experienced children and young people as set out in legislation and national policy including the Children Act 1989, the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Human Rights Act 1988 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The proposal is considered to be low risk as it supports the Local Authority to meet its statutory duties for care experienced children and young people.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

Consultation has taken place with care experienced children and young people to develop this proposal.

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