

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

DATE 9th October 2026

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

CORPORATE PARENTING : DEVELOPING OUR FUTURE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Corporate Parenting Board is asked to consider and endorse proposals to strengthen and evolve its governance arrangements through the establishment of a Corporate Parenting Partnership, replacing the current committee structure set out within the Council's Constitution. The proposal reflects the Board's ambition to further embed the voices of children in our care and care leavers, strengthen partner ownership of corporate parenting responsibilities and build on the significant progress made in developing an effective corporate parenting approach.

Subject to endorsement by the Board, a recommendation will be presented through the Council's governance processes for consideration and approval by Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Corporate Parenting Board is requested to:

1. Endorse the principle of transitioning from a constitutional committee arrangement to a Corporate Parenting Partnership.
2. Support the development of a revised governance model centred on co-production, partnership ownership and lived experience.
3. Consider potential chair/vice chair arrangements.
4. Support the development of revised Terms of Reference and membership arrangements to strengthen partner accountability and participation.
5. Agree that the proposals be progressed through the Council's decision-making arrangements, including Cabinet and Full Council, to seek approval for the cessation of the Corporate Parenting Board as a Council committee and the consequential amendments to the Council's Constitution.
6. Support the development of revised Terms of Reference and membership arrangements to strengthen partner accountability and participation.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1. The Corporate Parenting Board plays a vital role in ensuring that the Council and its partners fulfil their collective responsibilities to children in our care and care leavers. It provides strategic leadership, oversight and challenge whilst ensuring that the voices and experiences of children and young people influence priorities, decision making and service improvement.

2. Over recent years the Board has undertaken a significant programme of development to strengthen its effectiveness. Following the Council's 2023 ILACS inspection, additional focus has been given to corporate parenting leadership, partner engagement and the involvement of children and young people. This has included corporate parenting training for elected members, the development of the Stockton-on-Tees Corporate Parenting Strategy and Commitments and the introduction of bi-monthly informal young person-led meetings.
3. As a result, the Board has made significant progress in strengthening its corporate parenting approach. Partner engagement has increased, opportunities for participation have expanded and there is now stronger alignment between strategic priorities and the issues identified by our children and young people. This progress has been recognised through feedback from the Department for Education National Implementation Advisor for Care Experienced and through the Local Government Association's (LGA) review and development work with the Board.
4. In May 2026, Board members, partner organisations and care experienced young people participated in a development session facilitated by the Local Government Association to review progress against the Corporate Parenting Strategy and identify priorities for the next phase of development. The session concluded that while significant progress had been made, there was an opportunity to further strengthen participation, partnership ownership, accountability and delivery arrangements.
5. One of the key messages emerging from the session was the ambition to evolve the existing arrangements into a partnership model that better reflects the shared responsibility of all corporate parents and provides greater opportunities for children and young people to shape the work of the Board. Participants also highlighted the importance of retaining young people-led sessions, introducing themed partnership groups aligned to priority areas and strengthening accountability for delivery across the wider partnership.

RATIONALE

6. The proposed change to a partnership model is intended to build on the progress already achieved and support the next phase of development for corporate parenting in Stockton-on-Tees, by:

PLACING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE

7. Children and young people tell us that meaningful participation is about more than being consulted. It is about influencing decisions, shaping priorities and seeing evidence that their views lead to change.
8. The Board has already strengthened its approach by introducing young people-led meetings and enabling a young people's representative to attend formal Board meetings. These developments represent an important shift towards co-production and have become a valued part of the Board's work.
9. The LGA led development session highlighted a shared ambition to further strengthen the role of lived experience within governance arrangements. Participants agreed that future arrangements should create greater opportunities for children and young people to shape agendas, influence priorities and provide leadership within the Board itself.

10. The proposal for care experienced young people to co-chair the Board alongside senior political leadership demonstrates a commitment to shared leadership and reinforces the principle that the voices of children and young people should sit at the heart of corporate parenting.

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIP OWNERSHIP

11. Corporate parenting responsibilities extend beyond Children's Services and elected members. Improving outcomes for children in our care and care leavers requires coordinated action from partners across housing, education, health, community safety, employment, the voluntary and community sector and wider council services.
12. The May development session recognised the significant progress made in bringing more partners around the table but also identified opportunities to strengthen partner representation, ownership and accountability. Participants emphasised the importance of ensuring that all organisations see themselves as active corporate parents with a shared responsibility for improving outcomes.
13. A partnership-based Board would better reflect this collective responsibility and create a stronger platform for joint leadership, collaboration and shared accountability.

INCREASING FOCUS ON DELIVERY AND IMPACT

14. During the development session, Board members and attendees considered progress against each of the Corporate Parenting priorities and identified opportunities to strengthen delivery arrangements. Whilst the Board provides strategic oversight, there was recognition that some priority areas would benefit from dedicated forums bringing together relevant partners, practitioners and young people to drive improvement activity between Board meetings.
15. The establishment of themed priority sub-groups would enable deeper focus on key areas of work, strengthen accountability and ensure that progress against agreed priorities remains visible and measurable.
16. This approach reflects recognised good practice by creating clear links between strategic oversight, partnership delivery and improved outcomes for children and young people.

STRENGTHENING THE INFLUENCE OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

17. The Board's young people-led meetings have become an important mechanism for understanding the experiences of children in our care and care leavers and ensuring their voices directly inform strategic planning and design and delivery of services.
18. The development session strongly supported retaining these sessions as a core feature of future arrangements. Participants also identified opportunities to strengthen feedback mechanisms through a formal "You Said, We Did" approach, ensuring children and young people can clearly see how their views have influenced strategic decisions and service improvements.
19. Maintaining dedicated young people-led sessions alongside strategic business meetings will ensure that lived experience remains a central and visible part of the Board's work.

PROPOSAL

20. Subject to approval through the Council's governance processes, it is proposed that the current Corporate Parenting Board transitions to a Corporate Parenting Partnership.

21. The proposed partnership model would include the following key elements:

- Partnership-Based Governance - the Corporate Parenting Partnership would operate as a partnership forum rather than a formal committee of the Council. This would better reflect the shared responsibilities of all corporate parents whilst retaining strong arrangements for strategic oversight, challenge and accountability.

Elected members would continue to fulfil their responsibilities as corporate parents and formal reporting arrangements would continue through existing Council governance structures.

- Chairing Arrangements – to be discussed at the Board meeting.
- Retention of Young People-Led Sessions - the current approach of alternating strategic business meetings with informal young people-led sessions would continue. These sessions provide valuable opportunities for children and young people to share experiences, identify issues that matter to them and contribute directly to discussions about service improvement. It is proposed that future arrangements would strengthen the connection between these sessions and formal Board business through regular reporting and a strengthened "You Said, We Did" framework.
- Establishment of Themed Priority Sub-Groups - a series of themed partnership sub-groups would be established aligned to the Corporate Parenting Commitments and strategic priorities. These groups would bring together relevant organisations, practitioners and care experienced young people to drive improvement activity, monitor progress and develop solutions to challenges identified by the Board. The groups would report regularly to the Corporate Parenting Partnership, strengthening accountability and ensuring clear oversight of delivery.
- Strengthened Partner Representation - membership arrangements would be reviewed to reflect the partnership model and ensure appropriate representation from those agencies identified through the development session as having an important contribution to improving outcomes for children in our care and care leavers.
- Performance and Impact Reporting - the Partnership would continue to receive regular performance and outcome information and would be supported by strengthened reporting arrangements including annual reporting on progress against priorities and the impact of corporate parenting activity.

SUMMARY

22. The Corporate Parenting Board has made significant progress in strengthening its approach to corporate parenting over recent years. This progress provides a strong foundation for the next stage of development.

23. The proposed partnership model seeks to build upon existing strengths whilst further embedding participation, strengthening partnership ownership and providing greater

focus on delivery and impact. The proposals recognise that effective corporate parenting is achieved through strong relationships, shared accountability and meaningful involvement of children and young people in shaping services and support.

24. The proposed model of a partnership co-chaired with care experienced young people, themed sub-groups and continued young people-led sessions represents a strengthened approach to corporate parenting whilst maintaining robust oversight and accountability.

NEXT STEPS

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

- Preparation of a report seeking approval of the proposals through Cabinet and Full Council.
- Development of Terms of Reference and governance arrangements for the Partnership, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and the Director of Corporate Services.
- Development of themed priority sub-groups and associated delivery plans.
- Review of Board (Partnership) membership arrangements.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications from this proposal

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council has statutory responsibilities towards children in its care and care leavers, including the corporate parenting principles. These responsibilities rest with the Council but it is not a requirement for the Council to maintain a Corporate Parenting Board as a formal committee.

The current Corporate Parenting Board forms part of the Council's committee arrangements. The proposed Corporate Parenting Partnership would instead operate as a partnership and advisory forum, providing strategic oversight, challenge, partnership engagement and the involvement of children and young people. It would not exercise functions.

As the proposal involves the cessation of an existing Council committee and therefore amendment of the Council's Constitution, the final decision will require approval by Full Council. Subject to the Corporate Parenting Board endorsing the proposals in this report, the necessary governance changes will therefore be progressed through the Council's decision-making arrangements, including consideration by Cabinet and a recommendation to Council.

The report to Council will identify the consequential amendments required to the Constitution.

Terms of Reference for the Corporate Parenting Partnership will be developed as detailed above and will be agreed and maintained by the Partnership

The establishment of the Partnership will not alter the Council's statutory corporate parenting responsibilities.

Implementation of the new arrangements will take effect following Full Council approval.

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 Corporate Parenting Board members and attendees and care experienced children and young people to develop this proposal.

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