

Corporate Parenting Board

A meeting of Corporate Parenting Board was held on Friday, 12 June 2026.

Present: Cllr Lisa Evans (Chair), Cllr Clare Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr John Coulson, (Sub for Cllr Hilary Vickers), Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Sally Ann Watson

Officers: Junita Agyapong, Jane Smith, John Devine, Michael Henderson, Debbie Farrow, Laura Fenwick, Janet Wilson, Coral Pape, Chris Renahan, Majella McCarthy

Also in attendance: Molly Larkin, Alan Turner

Apologies: Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Lisa Robinson,

CPB Declarations of Interest **/25**

There were no declarations of interest.

CPB Minutes **/25**

The minutes of the meetings held on 13 February 2026 were approved as a correct record.

CPB Fostering Friendly **/25**

The Board received a presentation from the Fostering Service on the recruitment and retention of foster carers and the role of corporate parents in encouraging local employers to become Fostering Friendly.

Members were advised that there was a national shortage of foster carers and that Stockton was experiencing similar pressures. At the time of the presentation, 618 children were in the Council's care, including 208 living with kinship carers, 113 with in-house mainstream foster carers, 105 with independent fostering agency carers and 78 in residential provision. The shortage of fostering families contributed to reliance on external placements and residential provision, including for some younger children.

The Board noted the decline in approved mainstream foster carers and the increase in kinship arrangements. Although new approvals were beginning to increase, this was being offset by resignations and retirements. Members welcomed work to enable children to remain within their wider family networks where this was safe and appropriate, whilst recognising the continuing need for mainstream carers.

The presentation outlined the range of fostering opportunities, including emergency, short-term, long-term and respite care, parent and baby placements and supported lodgings. Members were advised that misconceptions about eligibility remained a barrier to recruitment, particularly assumptions that people could not foster if they worked, were single or had children of their own.

The Board heard about regional recruitment activity through Foster with North East, including advertising campaigns and a refer-a-friend incentive. Local activity included information sessions, recruitment stands, Council

communications and attendance at community events. The service intended to attend the Teesside Expo in September and was planning a business breakfast event to promote Fostering Friendly arrangements.

Members were advised that the Fostering Network's Fostering Friendly scheme was free and open to employers of all sizes. It encouraged organisations to promote fostering and support staff through flexible working and at least five days' paid leave for fostering responsibilities. Template policies could be provided to assist employers. Nearly 40 per cent of foster carers nationally combined fostering with other work, making employer support particularly valuable.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council was already a Fostering Friendly employer. Its policy provided eligible employees with paid time off for assessment and initial training, approval panels, reviews and training, together with the opportunity to apply for flexible working in connection with long-term placements.

Members discussed the reasons for the reduction in foster carers and how the trend could be reversed. Officers highlighted the retirement of existing carers, the need to attract a new generation and the importance of challenging misconceptions. The Board also noted improvements to the Council's fostering package, including professional fees, training and support, and continuing regional work to strengthen recruitment.

The Director of Children's Services highlighted the positive experiences shared by children at the annual foster carers' awards ceremony. Members recognised the value of communicating the difference fostering could make to children's lives and the rewarding nature of the role.

Discussion took place regarding the experience of prospective foster carers during assessment. Officers acknowledged that assessment needed to be thorough to safeguard children and explained that Stockton's approach emphasised openness about the process, supportive relationships and helping applicants overcome barriers.

The Board discussed how partners and councillors could promote fostering through their workforce communications, events, social media and business networks. Specific follow-up offers were made:

Regeneration would link the Fostering Service with the Economic Development Team and offer an opportunity to present to the Stockton Business Ambassadors' Group.

The NHS representative would link with the Integrated Care Board's HR, neighbourhood and communications contacts to explore Fostering Friendly status and awareness-raising opportunities. She would also link the service with a senior contact at Tees hospitals to explore promotion through hospital events and staff spaces.

The fostering leaflet, together with a short summary of the presentation, would be circulated by email to all councillors to share through their contacts and networks.

The Chair thanked the presenters and welcomed the offers of support from members and partners.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted and the follow-up actions identified during the discussion be taken forward.

CPB
/25

Forward Plan

Members discussed and agreed the Forward Plan.