

Corporate Parenting Strategy

May 2017 – May 2020



We are ambitious for all children, we will always strive for high standards to ensure we make a difference to improve the lives of children and young people in North Somerset



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. This is why 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 pledge to our children and young people. Our challenge is to deliver on this pledge, 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.

This strategy sets out how we intend to fulfil our corporate parenting responsibilities in a way that puts children and young people's views and thoughts at the heart of improvements in the planning, delivery and evaluation of our services.

Jan Barber



**Jan Barber, Executive Member
Children & Young People's Services**

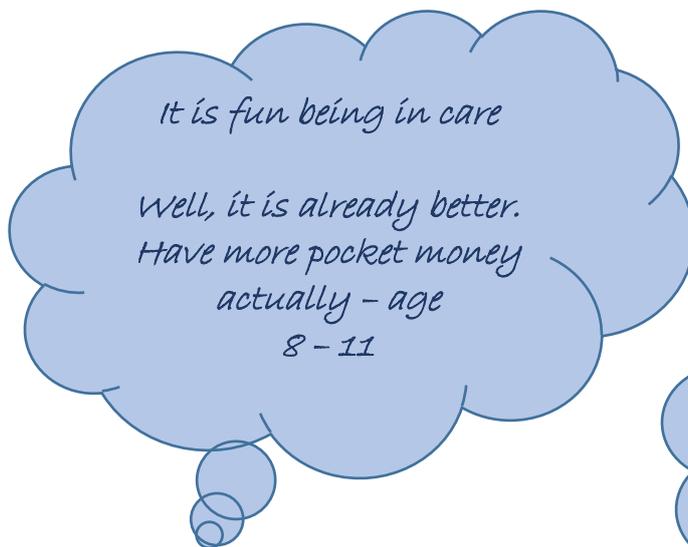
Sheila Smith



**Sheila Smith
Director of People & Communities**

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1. Introduction

North Somerset Council is ambitious for all children growing up in our local authority.

However, some children face particular challenges because of their needs or circumstances. It is essential that these children receive additional support and attention if they are to reach their potential.

Children and young people who are looked after by us and our Care leavers have a unique place in our community. When a child or young person cannot live with their birth family for a range of reasons and they become a Child who is Looked After, parental responsibility transfers to the local authority; this is referred to as corporate parenting. Corporate parenting was first enshrined in legislation through the Children's Act (1989). Although it does not have a formal legal definition, it is commonly understood to mean that officers and elected members of the local authority have a responsibility to take the same interest in the progress, attainments and wellbeing of children looked after and young people as a reasonable parent could be expected to have for their own children. Corporate parenting also extends to Care leavers.

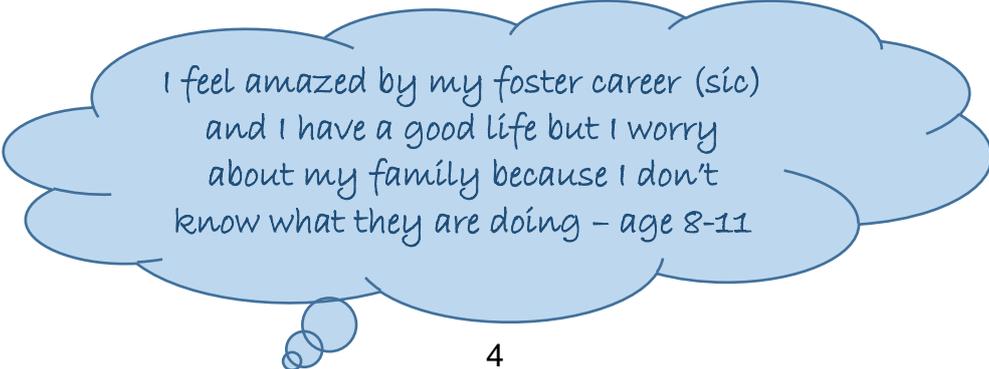
Corporate parenting means that everyone who works for North Somerset Council and the Councillors elected to make decisions for North Somerset have a special, important and critical part to play in supporting children and young people who are looked after by us and ensuring that our children and young people achieve good outcomes.

Acting as a corporate parent for children looked after is one of the most important duties that you have as a Councillor in North Somerset. Corporate Parenting should seek to ensure supportive relationships where young people feel cared for, not just looked after. Good corporate parenting involves championing the rights of children looked after and care leavers, and ensuring that they have access to good services and support from the local authority, partner agencies and individual lead practitioners.

'Our' Children and Young People

The use of the word 'our' is significant within North Somerset and signifies the responsibility and commitment we have to our children who are in or are leaving our care. We are passionate about outcomes for our children and our expectation is that all employees and Councillors in North Somerset, care for and care about our children and young people as we do our own children.

Our determination for excellence for our children and young people is demonstrated throughout the hard work of our frontline staff, our managers and the commitment and passion given by our members, and our senior leaders.



I feel amazed by my foster career (sic) and I have a good life but I worry about my family because I don't know what they are doing - age 8-11

2. Aim and purpose for this Corporate Parenting Strategy

This strategy forms the framework to which all North Somerset Council staff, Councillors and our partners will work. It aims to strengthen our good practice through a whole council approach to corporate parenting, so that we can, together, improve the current outcomes and life chances for all of our children who are looked after by us and those preparing to leave our care. It will:

- Outline our vision and the high expectations we have for all employees and Councillors in carrying out their corporate parenting responsibilities
- Highlight our progress to date and the areas we are working to improve to achieve better outcomes for children and young people in our care and leaving our care
- Identify our individual and collective responsibilities

3. What makes a Good Corporate Parent?

In the Keep on Caring 2016 government strategy for care leavers a 'good' corporate parent is described as:

'A good corporate parent should have the same aspirations for a child in care or care leaver as a good parent would have for their own child. It means providing them with the stability and support they need to make progress; and helping them to access new opportunities and experiences that inspire them to set ambitious goals for themselves. It means celebrating their successes, but also recognising that they will sometimes make mistakes and need help to get back on track. It also means supporting them to gain the skills and confidence to live independent lives, while letting them know that they have someone to call on for help if the going gets tough' (Keep on Caring 2016).

Every good parent knows that children require a safe and nurturing environment in which to grow and thrive. Parents protect and support their children in coping with the dangers and risks of everyday life. Parents are ambitious for their children and strive to support them to reach their potential. Parents celebrate and share in their children's achievements, however large or small. Parents provide care unconditionally to their child to support them to achieve. A child who is cared for by the Council has the right to expect everything that they would expect from a good parent in the community. It is vital that we recognise the importance of our partners in the statutory, voluntary and commercial sectors. North Somerset Council, cannot alone meet the needs of our children. Whilst this strategy is a North Somerset Council document, we will continue to work with our partners to ensure our children and young people receive high standards of support from all of the different agencies, schools and colleges we work with.

In North Somerset, as Corporate Parents we will:

- Always refer to our children who are looked after and our care leavers as 'ours' and use a benchmark 'would this be good enough for my child?'
- Encourage our children and young people to share their views with us, listen to what they tell us and respond to what they say
- Have high expectations and be ambitious for all of our children and young people

- Always be strong, firm and kind advocates with both individuals and organisations
- Be interested in our children and young people's successes, show our pride in their achievements, and celebrate with them
- Be there for them when they make mistakes, and make sure they are given as many chances as needed to succeed
- Help them to identify adults they can trust, who will stick by them no matter what
- Help prepare and support them over time, through a managed transition into adult life.

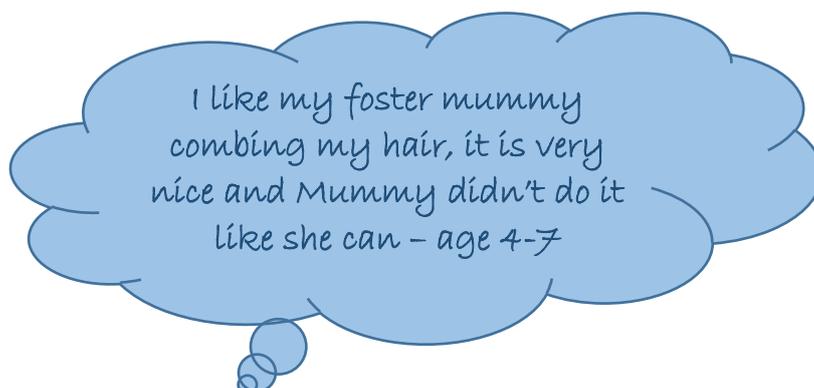
4. Background and Context

We have high expectations for children and young people's outcomes in North Somerset.

In 2014, we carried out an internal review into the services we were providing for children looked after by us and our care leavers. This review recognised that, even though these services had been recognised by Ofsted as good, we had higher aspirations when considering 'is this good enough for my child?'

Since then we have been working with our children and young people to better understand what we do well and what we still need to change and improve.

We currently look after approximately 220 children. This number has remained consistent for the last three years. This is lower than the national average but higher than that of our statistical neighbours. We also look after approximately 140 young people who are leaving our care.



5. Listening to our children and young people's views to drive improvement in North Somerset

So that we could improve how we listened and responded to both our children who are looked after and our young people preparing to leave care, we made the decision to run two separate young people's groups: one for children looked after which is known as Ambitious Voice, and one especially for care leavers, which is called Unite.

Both of these groups are led by our Children and Young People's Rights Officer and held every month. Following these meetings, a one to one meeting takes place with the Director

of People and Communities and our Children and Young People's Rights Officer. This way we can ensure that our young people's views are heard in a timely way by our Director. This has been a powerful way of ensuring the group's voices are heard and that the local authority responds appropriately. It also provides our leadership team with an invaluable direct view of how young people experience our services.

Highlighted below are some of the steps we have taken since the Review of our service to children we look after and care leavers, to listen to our children and young people and ensure that their thoughts, views and feelings are central to our improvement planning.



Bright Spots (Your Life Your Care Survey)

For the last three years we have been part of a research study with Bristol University and Coram Voice. The research study aims to improve the experience of care for all children who are looked after, give children a voice on their own wellbeing and highlight the 'bright spots' of practice that contribute to children flourishing in care.

Each year our children looked after age 4 – 18 have completed an on-line survey which focuses on their wellbeing, their experiences of care and things that are important to them. This high quality, evidence based research provides us with clear messages and a very good understanding of how our children view their wellbeing, their thoughts on what we are doing well and areas they would like us to improve.

In 2016, 97 children completed the survey; a response rate of 55%, the highest of all local authorities who took part.

Most (87%) young people (11-18 yrs) reported medium or high levels of well-being and thought that their lives were improving.

The full reports are available. Please contact Helen Caldwell on 01275 884579 if you would like a copy.

We are delighted to have heard from our partners, Bristol University and Coram Voice that this survey will continue with full funding for the next three years. We have also been asked to apply to support Coram Voice and Bristol University on a survey of the same quality for care leavers.

Make the rules less strict for over 16's, I feel like I am babied a lot of the time/don't always need so many checks – age 11-18

Our Pledge

Our Pledge has been updated with recognition of the importance of children and young people's wellbeing. Our Pledge to them responds directly to the clear messages they gave us through their response in the 'Your Life Your Care' surveys. Our commitment focuses on relationships, recovery, resilience and rights. In addition to this, there is also a section on support for leaving care (as this was highlighted in our care leaver's survey as an area for improvement).

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL'S PLEDGE for Children Looked After

The aim of our new pledge is to help you feel happy in the present and positive about your future. We have listened to the feedback you gave us when you completed the 'Bright Spots' survey

We will:

Support your Relationships

- Find carers for you who you like and trust
- Ensure you have an adult in school who looks out for you and notices the progress you make and how you are feeling
- Help you to see your birth parents, brothers and sisters, if you want to
- Identify adults who you can trust who will stick by you no matter what

Help you to feel safe and be happy whilst you are in care

- Help you to understand why you are in care
- Find caring homes for you, where you feel settled, with bedrooms that you like and carers who notice your feelings
- Enable you to do similar things to your friends and have access to a computer or a tablet with access to the internet
- Give you support if you are worried about your feelings or behaviour and notice when you do well
- Give you opportunities to show that you can be trusted

Help you to build Resilience

- Give you second chances if you make mistakes so you can show you can be trusted
- Make sure you have opportunities to have fun at weekends, spend time on your hobbies and explore the outdoors
- Help you with your homework and learning
- Support you to develop independent living skills such as cooking healthy food, washing clothes and going to the bank

Support your Rights

- Make sure that you know who your social worker is and how you can contact them
- Involve you and listen to you when decisions are being made about your care
- Make sure that you can speak to your social worker alone, if you want to
- Try hard to make sure that you are not singled out and that adults around you do not make you feel embarrassed about being in care
- Encourage you to attend regular health appointments to keep you healthy

Help you prepare for your Future

- Including where you will live and what you will do
- By helping you feel prepared for leaving care
- By supporting you in education and training so you can achieve your goals

Nigel Ashton
Nigel Ashton
Leader of the Council

Mike Jackson
Mike Jackson
Chief Executive
North Somerset Council

Sheila Smith
Sheila Smith
Director of People and
Communities

Bob Garner
Bob Garner
Chair of Children
Champions

Ambitious Voice Members (Children in Care Council)

Milke
Beth

Jamie
James
Katrina

Dominic
Gina
Leon

Sophia
Chanel

#Ambitious
voice



Introduction cards

It was hard to read in the survey findings that not all of our young people knew who their social worker was, or how to contact them. In response to this, our Children in Care council came up with the idea of 'Introduction cards' for all staff who work directly with children and young people. The cards include:

- some practical information about the worker, for example name and contact details
- a photo
- Some personal information about the worker for example, their favourite food or pet. This was included because the young people thought social workers know so much about them, they should know something about their social workers too.

Document and Keepsakes Box

As an extension of this, Document and Keepsake boxes were developed, again with the lead coming from our young people. The idea behind the box is that:

- It is somewhere for children and young people to keep their important documents,
- It contains information that has been especially designed in response to the survey. Information to help young people understand the 'processes and procedures' around their care journey and to better understand their rights and entitlements.
- Our Children in Care Council thought it was useful to have this information and some items when you first become looked after. for example, some post its and pens so they can write down questions they would like answering when they think of them, and a memory stick for transferring electronic documents

Principal Social Worker

We have invested in a Principal Social Worker who works to promote excellent professional practice, lead practice improvement and provide a bridge between practitioners and the senior leadership team. The role influences the delivery and development of social work practice, training and continual professional development.

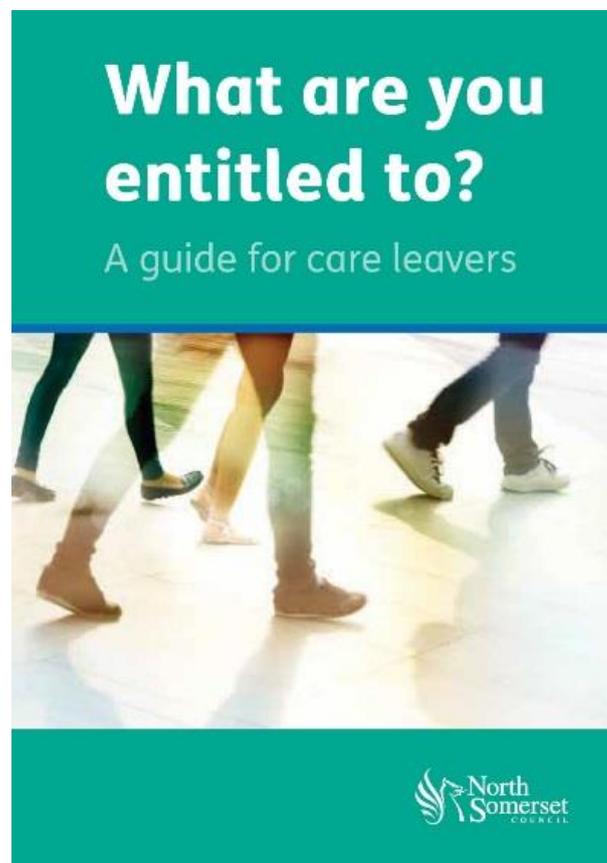
New Belongings

In 2015 – 2016, we were very proud to become part of the New Belongings Programme. New Belongings believes that care leavers should be '*known, cared for, cared about and enabled to care for themselves*'. As part of the New Belongings philosophy, our Chief Executive Officer and Leader of the Council made a commitment to listen to care leavers and let their views drive our development in the services they receive from us about improvements they would like to see. We began the year by undertaking a survey of our care leavers to better understand their views on what is working well and where they would like to see things improve. Since then, the following changes have been implemented as our care leavers requested:

Care Leaver Entitlements Leaflet

Our Care leaver Entitlement leaflet **was described by David Cameron, when he was Prime Minister, as '*absolutely brilliant*'**. It was put together by two of our care leavers, who were working for us as Apprentices at the time, in response to feedback from our Unite forum. Care leavers asked us for a clear explanation of exactly what they were

entitled to. They wanted it to be clearly laid out and easy to understand. They did not want to hear about opportunities in a chance conversation. In putting this together, we were able to revise our entitlements and make several changes as requested by our care leaver's forum, Unite.



Apprenticeships for Care Leavers

Over the last few years our understanding of the barriers care leavers face in transitioning from benefits or full time education into entry level jobs has increased enormously. We have put in place, with the support of Team North Somerset and our senior leaders a whole package of support to help our care leavers when they choose an apprenticeship route.

Our work and progress with care leavers and apprenticeships was recognised as best practice in '***A Submission from the Centre for Social Justice, to the Children's Commissioner for England - Delivering a Care leaver strategy for Traineeships and Apprenticeships.*** 2016

The case study of our work, which was included within the report is copied below:

Case study: North Somerset Council, Care Leaver Apprenticeships

For the last two years, we have focused on supporting our care leavers into an apprenticeship position with the council. We already had a thriving apprenticeship programme, but were concerned that care leavers were not taking advantage of these opportunities. Our North Somerset Partnership Board pledged to work together to address this as a priority. Team North Somerset, a multi-agency team, was created with ambitious targets around improving access to employment and training. They also wanted to understand from care leavers what was stopping them choosing council apprenticeship positions. As a result, we have taken on six care leaver apprentices and are hoping to recruit another three over the next couple of months.

To do this, we have had to make several changes to our policies and practises, which have been well supported by our senior leaders. For example, we have:

- Relaxed our recruitment criteria: rather than stipulating Maths and English GCSEs as essential requirements, we now support young people to achieve these qualifications as part of their apprenticeship
- we now offer flexible part time positions for young parents
- we now guarantee all care leavers interviews and provide feedback on their performance
- we now offer a fresh start to those who have previously been involved with police/custody.

Provide financial support:

- salary increase every six months
- we pay council tax costs for all apprentices (this has now been extended to all care leavers not just those on our apprenticeship programme)
- we provide transport costs
- we pay an initial grant of £400, to help avoid financial difficulties in the first month of the apprenticeship (with the support of a local benefactor). Chances
- we are sensitive to the external demands on our young people from outside work and provide several chances, as required, for them to succeed.

Partnership

- we have a shared vision and commitment across our partnership, particularly with Weston College.

It is important to note that despite the changes we have made, an apprenticeship is still an extremely difficult choice for care leavers.

It is almost impossible to cover all the costs involved with living independently, even with a more generous apprenticeship wage. Young people who live at home with a parent or guardian who pays for their day to day living expenses have a very different experience to care leavers who must pay for food, bills and rent each and every month.

Council Tax

Care leavers in North Somerset have consistently said to us that it is extremely difficult for them to move from being in education or on benefits into living independently on their first, often very low wage. However, through our renewed commitment as corporate parents to listen to our care leavers as we do our own children and respond to what they tell us, it became very clear that Council Tax is a particularly challenging bill for them to pay at this critical stage of their lives.

As a tax levied directly by the Council on local households/individuals, North Somerset Council took the view that it had the authority and discretion to create some relief for care leavers in terms of their commitments in this area. Moreover, as the corporate parent, we had an obligation to help care leavers meet their Council Tax commitments in the same way that parents or guardians might be expected to offer their children financial support in a similar situation.

What did we do?

Through discussions within the care leaver's forum, the Local Authority agreed to provide financial support to care leavers in terms of meeting their Council Tax commitments, but in a manner which was manifestly fair and proportionate. In this regard, it was recognised as

important not to exempt care leavers from Council Tax, given the difficult precedent this would be likely to set (ie other vulnerable and equally deserving groups would undoubtedly lobby for similar treatment on a justifiable basis). The challenge was therefore to formulate a transparent policy which did no more than provide a level of financial support to Care leavers, in the Council's role as corporate parent, which was little different from the support that parents or guardians might provide to their own children in similar circumstances.

Against this background, a policy was devised which involved North Somerset Council meeting the costs of Council Tax liabilities for those care leavers aged between 18 and 21, living independently and either unemployed or in apprenticeships or entry level jobs, in order to help manage their transition from education through to becoming financially independent.

We were the first local authority to take this step and were recognised for this good practice by Edward Timpson, Minister for Children in 'Keep on Caring' 2016 and also in Research in Practice.

*....authorities are thinking hard about what it truly means to be a corporate parent, looking at it through the lens of what any reasonable parent does to give their child the best start in life.....So, for example, North Somerset has taken the decision that its care leavers should not have to pay Council Tax until they reach age 22. We would encourage all local authorities to consider how they can support their care leavers like this, using the flexibilities at their disposal. **Edward Timpson, Minister for children, Keep on Caring 2016***

Supporting care leavers is a specialist area of work undergoing fast-paced change. One way to combat the variability of support available is to encourage services to share good local practice of what works, how it works and in what conditions. The New Belongings (2016) guide contains examples of 'changing practice', including:

- *Local authority work to extend mental health support for older care leavers (Staffordshire)*
- *Improved relationships with DWP (Trafford). > Easing care leavers' council tax burden (North Somerset).*
- *The introduction of care leaver mentors (Stockport).*
- *Creating a new space for care leavers to meet (North Somerset).*

The Care Leavers Transitions: Strategic Briefing 2017 – Research in Practice

A Safe Space, designed by Children Looked After and Care Leavers

The provision of a safe space or hub was prompted by a mix of care leaver feedback and local authority analysis of the need for a discrete area where care leavers and those still in care could meet, interact, provide and obtain mutual support and have access to essential information and services in a friendly "one stop shop" environment. The initiative was designed to overcome a problem where care leavers reported feeling isolated and neglected, and intimidated by a traditional support network which they didn't fully understand and considered largely inaccessible because of the complex, bureaucratic practices and procedures which applied.

So what did we do?

We identified a suitable unused space within its Town Hall in Weston-super-Mare, and engaged the care leaver's forum to agree, design and re-furbish the area based on an assessment of its own needs and wishes. The council allocated a budget of £2000 to the forum for this purpose. A separate side entrance was created for the sole use of those accessing the facility in order to give it a truly self-contained character, and obviate the

hassle of entering via the main Town Hall entrance and having to obtain passes from reception. In providing a self-contained space of this nature, and delegating responsibility for design and refurbishment to the care leavers Forum, the Council ensured that those using the facility felt a strong sense of ownership and pride.

The facility, which was opened in November 2015, is bright, airy and welcoming and has modern, fully equipped lounge, kitchen and dining areas with facilities for child care. It also has dedicated internet/Wi-Fi facilities and convenient access to both on-site and visiting service support staff (covering education, health, housing etc).

Outcomes for Children Service – May 2017

The Council has commissioned a new edge of care service through a Social Impact Bond model. This new service will work on both sides of the care divide. It will support families with children aged over 10 who are experiencing a crisis that could lead to a young person becoming looked after and will help to unify families where a child is in care under Section 20 with a plan to return home. Investment has been secured to enable the provider to develop and deliver the service and the Big Lottery will contribute up to 15% of outcome payments on a payment by results basis.

6. Children's Champions Group

The Children's Champions Group acts as a leadership body to the Council and its partners and provides challenge to ensure that corporate parenting duties are carried out effectively and consistently. It is the Group's responsibility to ensure that the outcomes and life chances of children looked after and care leavers are maximised, so they are in line with other children in North Somerset.

The views of our children looked after and our care leavers are made available to the Group through our annual surveys and representation from our young people's forums, Unite and Ambitious Voice at the quarterly Group meetings by our Children and Young Persons Rights Officer who is a member of this Group.

In addition to this, the Group has access to good qualitative and quantitative management information so that it is in a position to monitor performance effectively against outcomes. A shared view between senior leaders and Councillors means that all corporate parents are enabled to be effective critical friends.

The Group acts as the champion for our children and young people. Its role is to hold the Council and its partners to account if there are gaps in service provision, or outcomes for our children and young people are not improving.

The Group will reflect its key role of representing the wider corporate parenting responsibilities of all elected members and officers.

The Group membership consists of:

- 6 Councillors in addition to the Executive and Assistant Executive Members
- Foster Carer
- Designated Nurse for Children Looked After
- Virtual School Head Teacher
- Children's Rights Officer
- Assistant Director

- Service Leader, Resource Service

We expect members of Children's Champions to:

- Champion and promote the corporate parenting role across the authority and with partner organisations; develop your understanding of what effective corporate parenting looks like, e.g. through reading resources on the National Children's Bureau (NCB) website
- Develop your knowledge and awareness of government expectations in relation to the services provided to children looked after and care leavers, and the requirements of Ofsted when inspecting safeguarding and looked after services
- Review and monitor the services provided to children looked after and care leavers, by receiving and analysing the quantitative and qualitative information provided to the group, and offer appropriate support and challenge where improvements could be made
- Review the work of the fostering and adoption panels
- Ask about planning for children looked after – are care plans regularly reviewed and updated, and are the wishes and feelings of children looked after and care leavers taken into account?
- Consider how the group can effectively engage with children looked after and young people, as well as their parents and carers, and ensure that their views are listened and responded to
- Ensure that children looked after and young people are involved in the running of the group, and in setting the priorities and work programme; e.g. support 'takeover' initiatives where young people can chair group meetings
- Attend and support events and meetings which aim to improve outcomes for children and young people, and to celebrate their achievements
- Question what all Council directorates are doing to support children looked after, care leavers and foster carers

7. Our Individual and Collective Responsibilities

Whilst much of the responsibility for actually delivering care for children who are looked after and care leavers is delegated to staff within the Support and Safeguarding Branch, it is crucial that all employees of North Somerset Council understand that they too are corporate parents. Officers and staff within the local authority, also deliver services and support on behalf of their elected members.

We recognise that effective corporate parenting involves everyone, but that not everyone has day to day contact with children.

However, some communication and contact is valuable in helping Councillors and officers to understand the importance of the corporate parenting role, and in giving young people an

opportunity to express their views and concerns directly to those with the authority to make decisions and shape policy.

Every elected member, when elected to represent their ward, and every employee of North Somerset Council becomes a corporate parent as part of their role. It is crucial that all elected members and employees of North Somerset Council understand and commit to the following expectations:

As an employee of North Somerset Council, I will:

- Be aware of the role and its implications for discharging the local authority's legal responsibilities for children looked after and care leavers
- Advocate for children looked after and care leavers and be mindful of how my work might impact them
- Be accessible to professionals, carers and children looked after who may wish to raise issues or concerns
- Take an active interest in the issues facing children looked after and care leavers at a regional and national level
- Offer or help to secure employment opportunities, work experience or placements for looked after young people and care leavers
- Prioritise the needs of our children looked after and care leavers as necessary

As an Elected Member, I will:

- Be aware of the role and its implications for discharging the local authority's legal responsibilities for children looked after and care leavers
- Develop knowledge and awareness of the services available for children looked after and care leavers, both across the council and from relevant partner agencies
- Advocate for children looked after and care leavers – ensuring their voices are heard, their needs are met and their achievements celebrated
- Prioritise the needs of children looked after and young people in council decision making and budget setting discussions
- Consider the potential impact of all council decisions on children looked after , foster carers and care leavers
- Ask appropriate questions of officers across the council, not just in children's services, about the quality of services provided to children looked after and young people, and ensure that any issues identified are resolved in a timely manner
- Be accessible to professionals, carers and children looked after who may wish to raise issues or concerns

- Take an active interest in the issues facing children looked after and care leavers at a regional and national level, and bring any examples of good practice or new ways of working to the attention of the Assistant Director for Children's Support and Safeguarding.

As a Ward Councillor, I will:

- Be aware that there are probably children looked after and care leavers living in my ward
- Make an effort to find out about and understand the issues that children looked after and care leavers may face, and the support they may need from the local authority
- Be aware of any specific issues in my ward which may impact on the lives of children looked after or care leavers, and champion their cause when dealing with these matters
- Be proactive in ensuring that social workers, foster carers, children looked after and care leavers know how to contact me
- Attend and/or support foster carer recruitment and celebration events in my ward
- Ensure that the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services are made aware of any issues with services for children looked after and care leavers within my ward
- Take an active interest in facilities for children and young people in my area, and speak to staff about how they support the inclusion of children looked after and care leavers
- Maintain contact with the area social work and children looked after teams in my area, as well as staff in any residential homes; arrange to visit periodically and speak to staff about their experiences and challenges
- Know what provision (e.g. housing) is available for foster carers, children looked after and young people in my ward, and speak to social workers about ensuring that all children looked after are accessing universal healthcare and dental care
- Promote community understanding of children looked after and care leavers, and promote fostering within my ward, e.g. by providing leaflets at surgeries
- Monitor and challenge council policy for its impact on children looked after and care leavers
- Offer or help to secure employment opportunities, work experience or placements for children looked after and care leavers

As the Executive Member for Children's Services, I will:

- Hold the equivalent responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services at a local political level, as required by the Children's Act (2004)

- Ensure that the needs of children looked after and care leavers across the council are prioritised; including in funding discussions
- Make links with other executive members to ensure issues affecting children looked after and care leavers are taken into account and prioritised in all council decision making
- Ensure that the views of children looked after and care leavers are sought and used to influence service development and delivery
- Be accountable for the actions, decisions and delivery of services for children looked after and care leavers
- Ensure that policy or service development does not have any adverse effects on children looked after and care leavers
- Play a leading role in partnerships on behalf of the authority; particularly with the Health Service, to ensure sufficient priority is given to children looked after and care leavers
- Ensure that departments and agencies work with each other to ensure effective integrated working for existing services and ways of working

As an Assistant Executive Member, I will:

- Ensure that the needs of children looked after and care leavers across the council are prioritised; including in funding discussions
- Ensure that the views of children looked after and care leavers are sought and used to influence service development and delivery
- Be accountable for the actions, decisions and delivery of services for children looked after and care leavers
- Ensure that policy or service development does not have any adverse effects on children looked after and care leavers
- Ensure that departments and agencies work with each other to ensure effective integrated working for existing services and ways of working

As a member of Scrutiny Board, I will:

- consider children looked after and care leavers in our work; consideration will not be limited to the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel
- Examine the arrangements in place to support the wellbeing of children looked after and care leavers, monitor their effectiveness; challenge and scrutinise performance, and make recommendations for improvement

- Ask demanding questions of officers with responsibility for children looked after and care leaver services; seek qualitative as well as quantitative information to ensure that the experiences of children looked after are consistent with what the performance data shows, and ask questions of officers' interpretation of the data
- Ensure that issues relating to children looked after and care leavers are regularly considered at Scrutiny – prioritise any areas of particular concern, e.g. identified through inspections or reviews
- Involve children looked after, care leavers, parents, carers and partner agencies in the work of the Board; their direct feedback, and case studies of their experiences, should drive the work and the priorities
- Ensure that the findings and recommendations of the Board have an influence on policy, and encourage the sharing and embedding of good practice

As an Executive Member for another Directorate, I will:

- Consider opportunities for the needs of children looked after and care leavers to be prioritised within services in our portfolio
- Consider whether the decisions we take have an impact on children looked after and care leavers, and ensure appropriate steps are taken to mitigate any adverse effects
- Ensure that the executive considers issues affecting children holistically, particularly links between children's services, leisure, transport, housing policies and any other relevant areas of work

8. How will we monitor and measure success?

In addition to Children's Champions, we also have officer lead groups in place to monitor the progress of children looked after and care leavers. These groups have their own terms of reference and meet quarterly. The three subgroups feed into the main Children Looked After Progress Group:

Children Looked After Progress Group

- To Improve outcomes for Children Looked After as identified in the Support & Safeguarding Strategy - High Standards for Children and Young People
- To support, challenge and be accountable for delivering the Support & Safeguarding Strategy - High Standards, focusing on achieving the objectives as outlined in the Action Plan.
- To review and shape the data from each sub group
- To receive a report from the chair of each sub group
- To provide a link to the Safeguarding Board
- To identify task and finish pieces of work (for the sub groups)
- To annually review the impact of the Children Looked After Progress Group and Sub Groups
- To be able to ensure the inclusion and impact of children and young people's voice within the work of the sub groups
- To recognise and share good practice

Education, Employment and Training Sub Group

- To Improve outcomes for children looked after as identified in the Support & Safeguarding Strategy - High Standards for Children and Young People
- To ensure the inclusion and impact of children and young people's voice
- To recognise and share good practice
- To identify areas of improvement

Where children live Sub Group

- To Improve outcomes for children looked after as identified in the Support & Safeguarding Strategy - High Standards for Children and Young People
- To ensure the inclusion and impact of children and young people's voice
- To recognise and share good practice
- To identify areas of improvement

The Children Looked After and Care leavers Health and Wellbeing Sub Group

- To Improve outcomes for children looked after as identified in the Children Looked After Joint commissioning Strategy
- To ensure the inclusion and impact of children and young people's voice
- To recognise and share good practice
- To identify areas of improvement

9. Next Steps: Priority Areas for our Children who we look after

Through a combination of messages from our young people and our current data position, the following have been identified as priorities for improvement

We will focus on

1. Greater support with children and young people's mental Health

What are we doing

Secure additional funding to enable us to better support children looked after and care leavers Mental Health through an ambitious staff training program.

Implement our Mental Health Strategy for children looked after and care leavers including the development of Care Pathways for lower tier mental health intervention.

Review of our Consult Service and improving outcomes meetings for children looked after

Ensure our Health sub group is as mindful of mental health as it is physical health

2. Improvement of their educational outcomes

Develop our Personal Education Plan (PEP) document so that we are in a greater position to

- Work together with partners on a single holistic plan to support every child and young person's education
- hold all partners to account in delivering a good quality learning experience
- track and monitor the use of pupil premium more effectively

Develop our system for tracking school attendance and attainment

3. Support when we identify early signs of child sexual exploitation and when young people go missing from care

A Missing and CSE coordinator is in place to develop our practice to improve our response when children and young people are at risk of CSE or go missing from care.

Specialist CSE provided for young people who are assessed as being at risk of CSE

All Guidance material has been reviewed and updated

4. Improving the way we choose carers for children, so that they feel safe, happy and remain with their carers

A matching matrix and long term permanence policy has been developed and is being embedded into day to day practice

We will focus on

5. How we support them to become adults and transition from care, to leaving care

What are we doing

We are developing an ASDAN programme for young people as they prepare to leave care.

Transition of young people leaving care is a key priority of the Resource Service plan

Ongoing targeted work on the quality and effectiveness of pathway planning

Increasing the proportion of our young people who access staying put arrangements

6. Increase the Diversity of our foster carers

Work is ongoing to increase the number and diversity of foster carers. We are also embedding a therapeutic approach based upon the PACE model with planning to increase the number of placements for complex young people. This is set out in our Fostering Strategy

7. Improve the services and support we offer to our asylum seeking children and young people

A working group has been set up to improve services offered to our asylum seeking children and young people over the course of the next 12 months.

8. Continuous drive for improvement for high standards of social work intervention. This is underpinned by a solution focused, strengths based approach. Interventions in North Somerset value and promote relationship based practice.

Social workers, family support workers and young people support workers who are supporting our children have access to quality training to ensure their direct intervention skills are of a high standard. Interventions having a clear focus on motivating and promoting positive change, aspiration and strengths based goal setting.

10. Next Steps, Priority Areas for our Care Leavers

We will focus on

1. Improve housing options for our young people, particularly those who have the most complex needs

What we will do

A plan has been put together with the support of Anna Whelen. Care leavers will form part of our forthcoming strategy for commissioning Housing with Support services.

2. Improve the number of our young people who are engaged in employment, education and training

A post has been created to support the care leaving team with Employment options

3. Improve the support we offer to our young parents

Increasing links with children centres and our care leaving young people

Developing a bespoke parenting group for care leaving young parents

We will focus on

4. Improve the support we offer to our young people in custody

What we will do

Focus on better planning and multi-agency preparation for our young people leaving custody.

Increased joint working with the prison and probation service both operationally and strategically.

Exploration of a training pilot for prison staff with Bristol City Council and the South West Care leaver Forum

5. How we support them to become adults and transition from leaving care to independence or when appropriate, adult services

Implementation of the ASDAN pilot

Exploration of the 'Care Leavers Express' and money house model through the housing action plan.

Increased focus on the quality and effectiveness of pathway planning.

6. How we support our young people with their physical and mental health

Provision of specialist mental health service
Future in Mind

Provision of BAAF Health records to ensure our care leavers have a full health history

Access to free gym and leisure passes for our care leaving young people

Provision of specialist training to staff

7. How we encourage all care leavers to participate with us and continue to enable their views to drive service improvement

We are developing the care leaver Ambassador role

We are recruiting to another care leaver Apprentice position, to support participation work

We continue to work with Partners to identify opportunities to support our care Leaving Young People

Strong links between the Senior Management Team and Unite

8. Continuous drive for improvement for high standards of intervention, underpinned by solution focused strengths based approach. Interventions in North Somerset value and promote relationship based practice.

Access to quality training for all care leaving PA's to develop their direct intervention skills.

Interventions having a clear focus on motivating and promoting positive change, aspiration and strengths based goal setting.

11. Next Steps, Priority Areas as Corporate Parents

We will focus on

1. Ensure all Corporate Parents fully understand their corporate parenting responsibilities

What will we do

Purchase guidance on corporate parenting for key Councillors

Provide face to face training on the expectations set out in the Guidance

Share this strategy widely

2. Increasing young people's representation at Board meetings

Develop the role of care leaver Ambassadors and invite them regularly to present to the Board

3. The quality of data and information provided to the board to enable focus, challenge and support

Ensure data is always accessible to Children's Champions group members

Ensure reports are evidence based

Increase young person's voice at all Children's Champions Board meetings

4. Greater representation of Councillors attending celebration events

Plan events in advance, with plenty of notice

Ensure there is an annual plan in place

5. Young people's access to senior leaders

Continuing briefings to Leadership teams but with even more participation from our children and young people

Ensure our Chief Executive Officer, and Director are invited to attend Unite and Ambitious Voice

Developing opportunities through care leavers week

6. The voice of our Children and Young People's gathered through participation forums and opportunities is shared with all corporate parents at different times of the year through various meetings and events.

The feedback that is received informs both operational and strategic development.