

# **City of York – Corporate Parenting Board**

## **Annual Report** 2024/25

## ■ Contents

Introducing our annual report – Our Corporate Parenting Board Chairs .....	3
The Corporate Parenting Board .....	5
Our Strategic Priorities.....	5
Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services.....	6
What has the Corporate Parenting Board done in 2024/25?.....	8
Where you live .....	9
Family and Friends .....	11
Education .....	13
Health .....	16
Support into adulthood and independence.....	18
Good corporate parents .....	21
Looking to the future.....	23

## ■ Introducing our annual report – Our Corporate Parenting Board Chairs

### **Lauren, Co-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board and Abbie, Corporate Parenting and Co-Production Advisor**

The co-chairing of meetings by care-experienced young people has already brought about vital change. I am eager to see the progress that lies ahead.

The role of the Corporate Parenting and Co-Production Advisors is to seek and understand the views of young people and represent these at the Corporate Parenting Board, to help give professionals an insight into what it is like for care experienced young people living in York and some of the issues young people face. This involves the Corporate Parenting and Co-Production Advisors educating professionals on their role as a corporate parent, holding professionals to account and sharing care experienced young people's views. This is done through the Corporate Parenting and Co-Production Advisors report which is shared at each corporate parenting board. The report is written by the Corporate Parenting and Co-Production Advisors and is based on ideas, feedback, and suggestions from young people through 1-1 consultation, workshops, events, participation groups and at our place. (The care leavers hub.) This year, the Corporate Parenting and Co-Production Advisors have helped young people to have their voices heard in things such as family time, treating care experience as a protected characteristic within the council and getting a care leavers hub for care leavers.

### **Councillor Bob Webb, Co-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board**

This year has been a huge year for the Corporate Parenting with so much activity and so many positives to talk about. As Co-Chair of the Board and Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education I want to extend my thanks to my Co-Chairs throughout the year; Lauren and Owen, for all of their hard-work and commitment and also to the staff at the City of York Council who work tirelessly to make the successes a reality.

Ofsted visited York in March 2025 to assess Children's Services and I am so pleased that they identified the rapid improvements that have been made. The service is officially 'Outstanding' in all areas, and I believe that a large part of that judgement was won through the diligence and coordination of the Corporate Parenting Board. A clear change from the previous inspection was around whether children felt heard or not; through the Board children are now front and centre in decision making, where they belong. Ultimately this has led to more informed decisions and improved practise.

I now want to highlight a few of the individual wins that the Board has been involved with over the last 12 months.

The move-on panel is helping to secure and maintain stable homes for care leavers and since the introduction of this panel there have been no unplanned endings to Council tenancies.

Care-experience was recognised as a protected characteristic by the City of York Council following months of discussions with young people and research led by our Corporate Parenting Advisors. I believe that this has led to a stronger and more thoughtful approach to support and see our care-leavers and is a great example of Young People's Voice in action.

The Corporate Parenting Board also had an opportunity to be involved in the fostering review; again this has led to an improved offer for Foster Carers and ultimately for the children and young people in their care.

Family Time was something that children and young people felt needed improvement and through discussions in and around the Corporate Parenting Board an enhanced process has been created. The hope is that this will lead to a more natural feel to the meetings between children and their families.

Young people highlighted the need for support with access to work. The Department for Work and Pensions were invited to the Board and have created a much more in-depth offer for care leavers. This, alongside the Employment and Opportunities Broker post, means that I hope to see greater access to jobs for care-leavers over time. There has also been a change to the Local Offer, improving it to become more bespoke for Care Leavers wanting support with universities and also, importantly, supporting access to apprenticeships.

In health, Care leavers aged 18-25 now have access to free prescriptions. The health sub-group is still working with health colleagues to improve access to Dentistry and Optometry. These wins for our Care Leavers will save them money and improve their health outcomes.

Finally, I would like to thank staff for all of the opportunities to come together and celebrate that there have been in the last 12 months. From football and pizza to graduation ceremonies in the Guildhall, going that extra mile for our young people is absolutely welcome and what makes us Outstanding in all areas.

## ■ The Corporate Parenting Board

We are committed to York being an effective, caring, and ambitious corporate parent and we will do everything we can to make sure that children in our care and care leavers receive the best possible care and support.

City of York Council looks after a number of children and young people who are unable to remain in the care of their parents. When a child enters our care, the Council takes on a special role called ‘corporate parenting’. This means the Council is responsible for ensuring these children receive the same care and opportunities as any loving parent would provide. A good corporate parent always asks, “If this were my child, would this be good enough?”

The Corporate Parenting Board leads this effort, focusing on the needs of children and young people in our care, as well as those who have left our care. The Board works with Council members, staff, partner agencies, and the children and young people themselves to champion their needs and ensure their well-being.

This is the 2024/25 Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board. This report outlines progress in achieving the aspirations set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the work of the Corporate Parenting Board in the last year.

In 2024/25 the Corporate Parenting Board has piloted the use of three sub-groups to test if this can help drive forward work in some key areas. The sub-groups focused on:

- Education
- Housing
- Health

## ■ Our Strategic Priorities

The report is grouped around the six strategic priorities set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Where you live

Family and  
Friends

Education

Health

Support into  
adulthood and  
independence

Good  
Corporate  
Parents



## ■ Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services

In March 2025 Ofsted visited York to undertake a full Inspection of York's Children's Services. This was a three-week long inspection where Ofsted assessed how well we are fulfilling our duties to children in need of help and protection, children in care, and care leavers. Ofsted uses a "whole system" approach, meaning it looks at how all parts of the local authority, alongside partners, contribute to positive outcomes for children and young people.

A core element of the inspection is support to children and young people in care and the experiences of children leaving care and moving into adulthood. This includes reviewing how well the Corporate Parenting Board oversees, challenges and champions our duties as corporate parents. Throughout the inspection Ofsted spoke directly to children and young people about their experiences.

We are proud that Ofsted found York to be ‘Outstanding’ in all areas of our work. The full Ofsted inspection report is available online<sup>1</sup>. We have pulled out some quotes that are particularly relevant to include in this year’s Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

*“The local authority has a determined focus on its role as corporate parent. Leaders act as corporate parents, advocating and championing children and young people. The innovative development and strengthening of the Corporate Parenting Advisor role ensures that children and young people are represented at the corporate parenting board, facilitating co-production and a collaborative approach to service design, which is now a real strength. The corporate parenting board is now co-chaired with care-experienced young people, evidencing how York values the voice of children and young people in holding leaders to account. The introduction of subgroups has enabled projects to gain traction and achieve positive change for children and young people. This has led to the greater involvement of some agencies and directorates, which is influencing decision-making. The needs of care leavers are considered at every layer of the organisation, by partners and other directorates, giving an entire council approach.”*

*“Cared for children receive a high-quality service from workers who know them exceptionally well and encourage them to aspire for their future. These relationships enable workers to fully respond to children’s individual and unique needs. Many children do well and are settled where they live.”*

*“Participation and engagement with children and young people is a real strength and has been pivotal in informing decisions and plans for individual children and service-wide development. This has developed and improved considerably since the last inspection. Children have a solid influence in shaping the local authority’s provision of services through contact with corporate parenting advisers, participation groups, engagement events and attendance at the corporate parenting board. Children and young people told inspectors that they feel listened to and valued.”*

<sup>1</sup> [LA NAME - standard-short inspection report - INSPECTION DATE](#)

## ■ What has the Corporate Parenting Board done in 2024/25?

Throughout 2024/25 the Corporate Parenting Board has overseen and driven a wide range of work covering all of our priority areas. This is summarised below and explore further in the report.



## ■ Where you live

### **What our strategy says:**

We will do our best to find you carers who will get to know you and help you feel safe, comfortable and cared for. We will listen to you so we can try to find you the right place to live.

We recognise the need to develop our Sufficiency Strategy so that there are more options for where children and young people in care can live.

### **What has the Corporate Parenting Board done to support this?**

Reviewed Housing support for care experienced young people

The Corporate Parenting Board was given an update on the progress and impact of the Care Experienced Young People Housing Protocol. The board heard how over the past year, young people have been supported to access housing through the protocol, and that those houses had new carpets and decoration, and in some cases young people choosing to do the decorating themselves.

The Move On Panel, established in January 2024, has been instrumental in ensuring safe and suitable housing for care leavers. The panel, which includes representatives from Housing, Pathway, and other key teams, uses a comprehensive tracker to monitor young people's housing situations, support needs, and risk of homelessness. A key achievement of the panel is that there have been no unplanned tenancy endings for care leavers in council properties since its implementation. The panel has also improved the resolution of tenancy issues and highlighted the increasing housing needs of young people, prompting collaborative efforts to find creative solutions.

The report confirmed that a new safeguard has been put in place for care leavers, requiring Senior Manager sign-off on any "intentionally homeless" decision to ensure all options to support young people are fully considered first. This change provides a robust safety net, and the board was assured that no such decisions have been made for care-experienced young people.

The board recognised that the enhanced offer is proving to be a great success but that it required ongoing commitment of staff and resource to be sustainable. The board wanted to celebrate that exceptionally positive and close working between young people and in particular the housing team. The work to support care experienced young people in relation to housing is a real strength for York.

## **Contributed to the fostering review**

In June 2024 the Corporate Parenting Board considered the review of the fostering strategy “Making things better for everyone.” The strategy aims to improve the service’s structure, processes, and support. The goal is to ensure foster carers are well-supported, fairly compensated, and equipped to meet the diverse needs of children and young people in care.

The board was given assurance that the voices of young people are being incorporated into this process, and an independent review by Fosterlink has validated the direction of this work. The Corporate Parenting Board supported this work and could see that the long-term benefits include a more robust fostering service that can provide more local placements, reducing the reliance on costly external agencies and ensuring children can remain close to their families and communities.

In March 2025 the Corporate Parenting Board received a further detailed report outlining plans to introduce a new fostering fee framework. This new framework aims to improve the financial offer to foster carers, making the service more attractive to new recruits and supporting the retention of existing carers. The proposed changes were developed through extensive consultation with both foster carers and fostering service staff, ensuring their perspectives were incorporated.

The new framework moves from three to four payment levels, with a significant increase to the entry-level fee. This is a key part of the strategy to address the recruitment and retention challenges outlined in the report and to reduce the need for high-cost placements with independent fostering agencies. The board was assured that the new framework provides clear, transparent progression for carers and aligns with the authority’s goal of ensuring children can be cared for within their local community, close to their families and support networks.

The proposals gave the board confidence that the new model would be better for children and young people and sustainable. The board explored how the new framework would be introduced and that a plan is in place to protect the current skills fees for existing placements, providing stability for both carers and the children in their care. The board was assured that existing foster carers will be supported through the reassessment process and that their skills and experience will be fully recognised. The report demonstrates a clear understanding of the challenges and a robust plan to achieve positive outcomes for care-experienced children and young people by building a strong, sustainable, and well-supported fostering service.



## ■ Family and Friends

### **What our strategy says:**

We recognise how important relationships are in supporting young people to thrive and become independent. We will work hard to support you to keep in touch with family and friends and if this is not possible, we will help you to understand why.

We will prioritise the development of positive and stable relationships between children and young people in care and their support network.

### **What has the Corporate Parenting Board done to support this?**

#### **Refreshed York's approach to Family Time**

The Corporate Parenting Board was updated on consultation with care-experienced young people regarding their experiences about Family Time. The consultation, led by Corporate Parenting Advisors, engaged young people aged 7 to 25 through individual meetings, the Children in Care Council, and residential settings.

The feedback collected has provided clear insights into what young people consider “good family time.” They shared that they want to be more involved in the planning process, including deciding who they see, how often, and where. They emphasized the importance of seeing extended family and friends and having professionals respect

their relationships. They also expressed a strong preference for family time to occur in “normal” community settings like parks or cafes, and requested funding for memorable activities like bowling or trips to the seaside.

The feedback and direct input from Corporate Parenting Advisors has been used to develop our new Family Time policy. This has been launched in July 2025. These changes aim to ensure young people feel heard, their relationships are respected, and their experiences of family time are positive and meaningful.

### **Developing the “Together, We Can” Residential Model**

The Corporate Parenting Board received a progress update on the development of the Together, We Can children’s home and support model. The board explored how this model is playing an important role in reducing the number of young people needing to live out of the local area. This new model, which includes Wenlock Terrace and Ousecliffe Gardens, was co-produced with young people who have lived experience of care.

At the time of the report the service had been operational for six months and, had encountered expected challenges with establishing a new service. The board could clearly see the team is focused on building strong, trusting relationships with young people.

The report provided a powerful insight into the young people’s experiences, which were collected through a formal questionnaire. Young people shared that they feel safe and settled, appreciate being listened to, and value having freedom and being close to their families and friends. They also highlighted areas for improvement, such as consistency in rules among staff and addressing the behaviour of other residents. These insights will be used to continually improve the service.



## ■ Education

### **What our strategy says:**

We will work to support young people engage with education that helps them to reach their potential. We want to make sure children and young people have a sense of 'belonging' in schools. We will also develop our approach to apprenticeships and access to employment so young people can realise their ambitions.

### **What has the Corporate Parenting Board done to support this?**

#### **Virtual School**

The City of York Virtual School's annual report for the 2023/24 academic year was reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Board. The report highlighted a collaborative approach, with the Virtual School acting as a champion for care-experienced children by working closely with corporate parents, carers, social workers, and schools. A core component of their work is ensuring that children have stable, high-quality education through Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and the provision of targeted support and funding via Pupil Premium Plus.

During the academic year, the Virtual School supported a cohort of 208 children and young people of statutory school age. The annual report highlights that this group is dynamic, with 32 children entering care and 39 leaving, resulting in a total of 165 children in care at the end of the year. This is a decline from the previous year's total of 187. The report shows a positive trend toward local placements, with 62% of children educated in York schools, up from 58% last year. While the rest are in schools across the country, the Virtual School prides itself on building strong relationships with these institutions to ensure consistent support.

The report also highlights key needs within the Virtual School with 57% of the children having a Special Educational Needs (SEN) status, a slight increase from the previous year. This proactive identification of needs is crucial for putting the right support in place without delay. Impressively, 88% of the cohort were educated in mainstream schools, demonstrating a strong commitment to inclusion. The board heard that the number of young people in special schools has increased, but this is viewed as an appropriate response to the young persons needs detailed in their Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

The report provides a detailed snapshot of academic performance. There was a strong performance in Key Stage 4, with young people achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grade 4 or above, including English and Maths. This is a significant improvement on the previous year and shows the impact of the Virtual School's targeted interventions. However, outcomes for Key Stage 2 were not as strong as the previous year and remain a priority.

The Virtual School shared how it works to ensure good attendance and engagement with education. Overall attendance remained at 88%, a positive figure, though the Virtual School continues to work on reducing persistent absence. The team's swift interventions for children at risk of suspension helped reduce the number of school days lost, and there were no permanent exclusions, which is well below the national average.

The Virtual School outlined clear priorities for 2024/25:

- Continue to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence.
- Develop strategies to better support children through home and school moves, particularly those at risk of suspension.
- Focus on improving outcomes for Key Stage 2 students.
- Strengthen partnerships to provide a more cohesive and effective support system.
- Raise awareness of the disadvantages that children with a social worker often face to ensure all agencies hold high aspirations for these young people.

This comprehensive report demonstrates the Virtual School's dedication to making a tangible difference in the lives of care-experienced children, acknowledging both their successes and the challenges that still need to be addressed.

In April 2025 the National Association of Virtual School Head Teachers (NAVSH) undertook a peer review of the Virtual School. The learning and actions arising from this will be considered by the Corporate Parenting Board and reflected in the 2025/26 Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

## **Developing our Apprenticeships offer**

The Corporate Parenting Board received a report on the review of the apprenticeship offer for care-experienced young people. This was prompted by feedback from young people themselves and aims to improve support for identifying, applying for, and securing apprenticeship opportunities. The report detailed initiatives already in place and explored ideas for potential ways the offer could develop further.

Current work includes tailoring communications and events to better reach care experienced young people, such as providing specific information at apprenticeship fairs without making young people feel singled out. The council's Human Resources team is also working to champion a guaranteed interview scheme for care-experienced young people and to provide support to managers. Data from the past few years shows a small but steady number of care-experienced young people starting apprenticeships.

The report also recommends a personalised support package to address barriers faced by young people, such as providing targeted support for English and math skills, offering ringfenced apprenticeship opportunities within the council, and financial support for those

living independently. Following discussion at the board work to further develop the offer was agreed and will return to the board in future.

## **Employment and Opportunities for Care Leavers**

The board welcomed the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to further develop joint working to support care-experienced young people in employment and training. The collaboration is facilitated by the Employer and Partnership Manager for the DWP and the council's Employment and Opportunities Broker.

The role of Employment and Opportunities Broker was created as part of the new Staying Close team that was launched in January 2024. The purpose of the role is to provide intensive support to young people leaving care and into independence by focusing on employment and training. It is a front facing role that entails going out into the community and to businesses in York and building a network of employers, local and national, to broker a commitment to support York's care leavers. This could include offers such as work experience, mentoring, training, guaranteed interviews, tours and talks. In addition to this, it is part of the role to engage with and develop meaningful, trusting and respectful relationships with young people, being able to see beyond any perceived barriers and harnessing their skills, interests and strengths in preparation for work experience placements, work shadowing placements, internships, traineeships, apprenticeships and employment.

The aim of the role is to foster high aspirations, motivation and a range of experiences for care leavers, with the aim of increasing the number of care leavers, primarily those moving into independent living from residential care, in employment, education and training.

Key achievements in 2024/25 included:

- A Youth Employability Work Coach from the York Jobcentre providing regular, on-site support to care leavers at Howe Hill Hostel for benefit and employment-related queries.
- The DWP's Employer & Partnership Team collaborates with the Employment and Opportunities Broker to connect care leavers with a network of supportive employers. This includes support to employers and the support available for care leavers, such as funding for interview clothing and basic skills training.
- The DWP also offers individual support to care leavers, including CV reviews, mock interviews, and sector-specific guidance when referred by the Care Leavers team. They can also deliver group sessions on topics like CV writing, interview techniques, and applying for apprenticeships.

### **What our strategy says:**

We will work in partnership with health to ensure that the health needs of children and young people in our care are prioritised and met. We will do our best to ensure children have access to appropriate support in relation to their well-being and mental health.

### **What has the Corporate Parenting Board done to support this?**

Throughout 2024/25 the Corporate Parenting Board received numerous reports on understanding and responding to the health needs of care experienced children and young people.

The Health Subgroup, piloted this year, is a professional partnership formed to enhance the health outcomes of children in care and care leavers. This bimonthly meeting, co-chaired by the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding and Children in Care and the Head of Corporate Parenting, drives joint working between key areas of health and the local authority.

- **Improved Health Assessments:** NIMBUS care and the “Show Me That I Matter” young people’s group have worked together to create an informative video about Initial and Review Health Assessments. This co-produced video aims to increase understanding of the process and boost attendance rates.
- **Complex Care Needs Pathway:** A new pathway has been developed for Initial Health Assessments for Children and Young People with complex, continuing, or disabled care needs. This ensures that relevant professionals with knowledge of the individual are involved in a timely manner.
- **Immunisation Coverage:** Current data shows that 74.3% of children in care are fully up-to-date with their immunisations. While this figure is impacted by the often-limited immunisation history of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children upon entering care, addressing any gaps in vaccinations is a fundamental part of both Initial and Review Health Assessments.
- **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ):** For children aged 4-16 in care, an annual SDQ is completed by or about them (parent/carer, child, and school versions). This emotional and behavioural screening tool shows that 80% of children have an up-to-date score. If a child’s total difficulties score is outside the normal range (over 18, which applies to 30% of young people), professionals will triangulate scores from all three sources to determine if additional support is needed. These scores are recorded on their ePEP and health assessments for social worker access.
- **Digital Health Summaries for Care Leavers:** For young people leaving care at 17, a comprehensive Health Summary is provided, detailing their health history, including antenatal, early childhood, and immunization records. The health team is actively

working to integrate these summaries into the GP record and make them accessible via the NHS online app, moving away from easily misplaced paper copies. Young people are now also asked at their final Review Health Assessment if they have online access and if they need support with this.

- **Enhanced Care Leaver Health Offer:** Care leavers aged 18-25 now have access to free prescriptions if they don't meet other exemption criteria. This information has been widely disseminated through the local offer, the Care Leavers app, and the quarterly newsletter. The Integrated Care Board (ICB) is also exploring expanding this offer to include free dental care, optician services, and glasses for care leavers.

The Health Subgroup is actively working on future priorities:

- **Dental Health Promotion:** Developing options to distribute oral health packs (care boxes) to children in care to promote preventative dental hygiene.
- **Enhanced Mental Health Support:** Developing a tailored mental health support offer specifically for Children in Care, integrated into the ICB Mental Health Strategic Workplan.
- **Support for Pregnant and Expecting Care Leavers:** Initiatives are underway to ensure all agencies understand and address the specific needs of pregnant and expecting care leavers.



## ■ Support into adulthood and independence

### What our strategy says

We will support care-experienced young people prepare for independence, developing essential skills, and nurturing meaningful relationships to empower them in their journey towards a successful and fulfilling life.

### What has the Corporate Parenting Board done to support this?

#### “Our Place” – A New Care Leaver Hub for York

Throughout 2024/25 the Corporate Parenting Board supported young people’s aspiration to develop and pilot a proposed “Our Place” Care Leaver Hub. Corporate Parenting Advisors and care experienced young people visited other areas to see how they had developed similar offers. Officers worked together with young people in 2024/25 to develop plans and review different options.

The hub aims to provide a welcoming space where care leavers can access vital information, learning opportunities, and support from various teams, including the Pathway team, Speak Up, and housing. Young people have actively shaped the vision for the hub, expressing a desire for:

- Drop-in sessions with professionals (e.g., pathways, sexual health, housing, clinical psychologists).
- Access to information from diverse organizations (e.g., Citizens Advice for entitlements, businesses like Tesco for job opportunities).
- Peer support groups tailored to different needs (e.g., young parents, over 25s, asylum seekers).
- Workshops on essential life skills (e.g., first aid, cooking, money management, tenancy management).
- A safe space for events and forums.

We are excited to pilot a new hub for Care Leavers at Hungate Explore reading cafe in 2025. The pilot period will run initially for a period of six months across one day a week. The learning from this pilot will be used inform longer term planning and identify a permanent home ‘Our Place’.

### Cost of living support

The Pathway Service successfully secured £45,000 from the Household Support Fund (Phase 2) to help care leavers in York with the rising cost of living. This funding was distributed through an online voucher-based system. These vouchers primarily assist with fuel costs, food, and other essentials, with emergency cash payments available in exceptional circumstances.

The Corporate Parenting Board was updated on how the scheme has been used and what this has meant for young people. Over the course of the year the scheme provided 282 vouchers worth £15,711 to over 60 young people. The majority of these (256 vouchers) were for supermarkets, with a smaller number used for emergency cash payments, clothing/home items, and energy costs.

Feedback from young people was crucial in shaping the scheme. They emphasized the desire for a simple application process without excessive documentation. As a result, the application involves a straightforward conversation with a Pathway Team member to identify needs. Young people can apply up to three times a year for vouchers up to £60 per application, with management approval for additional requests. This accessible approach has been highly valued by care leavers, who appreciate the flexibility and the peace of mind knowing there's a safety net during tough times.

Young people have fed back positively about the support.

*"It's a very valuable scheme for emergency situations or when times are tough. It is good knowing that just in case something goes wrong there is an option to fall back on if absolutely necessary. It's also good because they can be issued for a variety of shops so therefore is easily accessible by various people who may be limited to what shops are close by."*

**22 yrs**

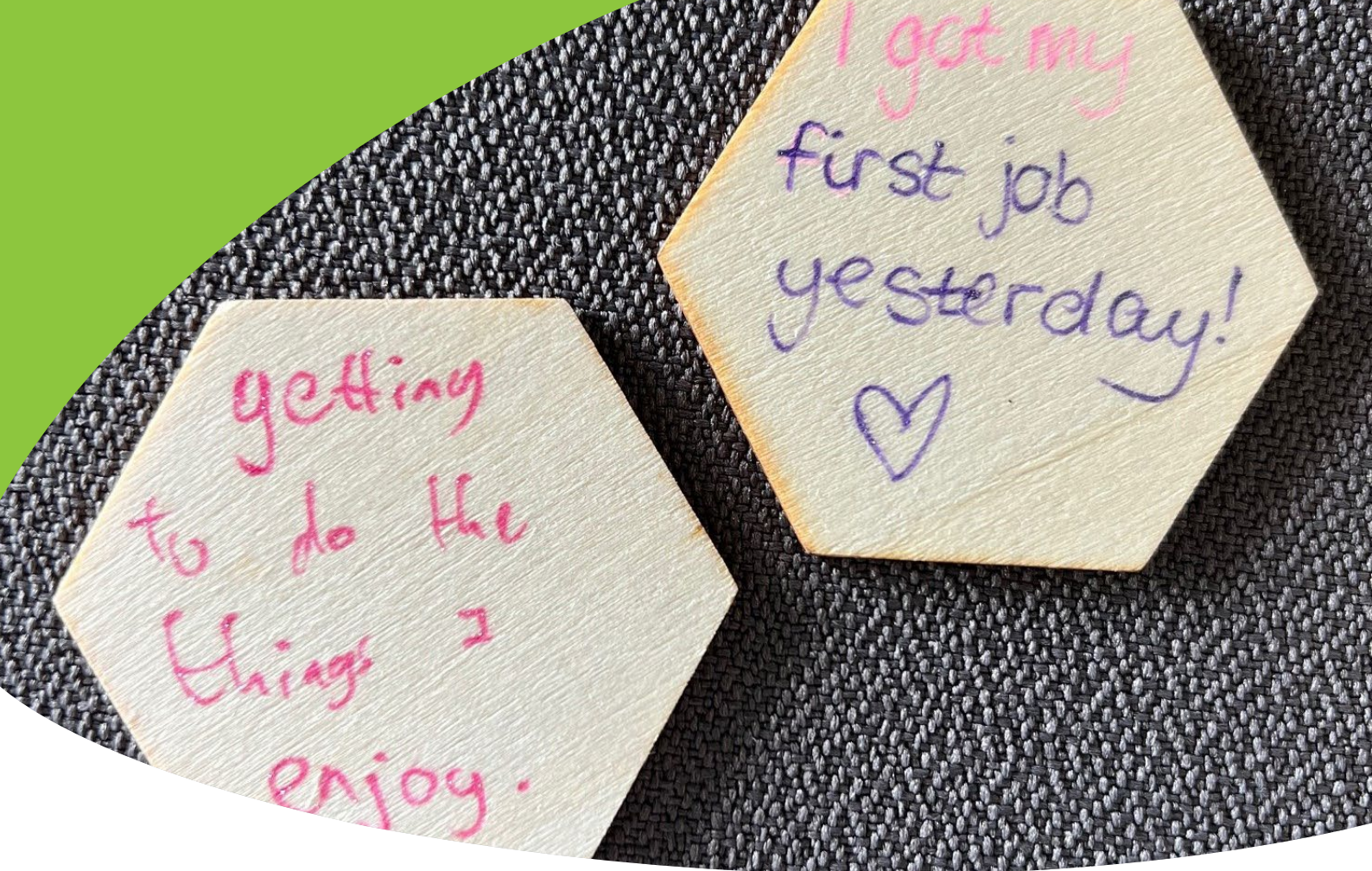
*"They help when you are struggling due to prices going up and down in bills etc they are all different range so it's very helpful as it isn't just one certain place it's a different variety of places so if you live far away you could get something closer to you."*

**24 years**

The Pathway Service will explore future options for how his support could be sustained or how care experienced young people could access others forms of support in the future.

### **York's Enhanced Local Offer of support for children leaving care**

The Corporate Parenting Board welcomed York's Enhanced Local Offer for Care Leavers, designed to provide more individualized and flexible support based on feedback from young people and the National Advisor for Care Leavers. The updated offer aims to move away from a "one-size-fits-all" approach, addressing specific needs and promoting greater autonomy as young people transition into adulthood.



Key enhancements to the Local Offer include:

- **Extended Bus Pass:** The age for receiving a bus pass will be extended from 21 to 25 to improve access to employment and education, aligning with the city's climate agenda.
- **Emotional Well-being App:** An annual subscription to a mindfulness app focusing on sleep, meditation, and relaxation will be offered, directly responding to young people's expressed priority for emotional well-being support. Usage and impact of the app will be reviewed.
- **Addressing the Council Tax "Cliff Edge":** The current one-year Council Tax exemption will be replaced with a sliding scale over a three-year period: 100% in the first year, 50% in the second, and 25% in the third. This tapered approach aims to prevent a sudden financial "cliff edge" and allows greater flexibility with budgeting.
- **Contribution to Internet Access:** Recognizing the essential role of internet access in modern life for social interaction, mobility, study, and learning, a monthly contribution to broadband costs will be provided for 12 months.

To balance the offer and ensure fairness, particularly for those undertaking apprenticeships, there will be a change in how university accommodation costs are supported. Instead of covering these in their entirety, a more individualized assessment of need will be undertaken, alongside an annual contribution of £2,500 and a £2,000 bursary. This approach is more aligned with regional practices and encourages young people to explore additional support offered by universities.

## ■ Good corporate parents

### What our strategy says

Everyone will play their part in being a good corporate parent by actively fostering a nurturing and inclusive environment that empowers care-experienced young individuals to thrive. Our Children and Young People have a voice in the way we deliver our services and we will act upon what they tell us.

### What has the Corporate Parenting Board done to support this?

#### Treating care experience as a protected characteristic

The Corporate Parenting Board in York has successfully championed treating care experience as a protected characteristic. This significant step, strongly advocated by York's care leavers forum, aims to empower care-experienced individuals and further embed the local authority's Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

Extensive consultation was undertaken with care-experienced young people, foster carers, professionals, and senior leaders to gather diverse perspectives and explore any unintended disadvantages. While acknowledging concerns about tokenism or the creation of further stigma, the Corporate Parenting Advisors conducted in-depth discussions to ensure the decision was meaningful and truly responsive to the young people's views.

In November 2024, the motion was unanimously approved by the Council's Executive, recognising the extensive work involved to engage young people in developing the proposal. The next crucial phase involves successfully embedding this new characteristic within the local authority's operations, with a strong focus on its integration into the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy. The Council's Head of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is working with Corporate Parenting Advisors on how care experience will be included in the strategy. The Corporate Parenting Board will closely track progress the delivery of this important commitment.

#### Supported key events – e.g. Speak Up and Celebrate event and Care Leavers week

As a Corporate Parent we want to support and empower young people through shared celebration and social activities. Our celebration events and care leavers' week were great demonstrations of this, with a diverse range of engaging events. These celebrations provided invaluable opportunities for connection, skill-building, and co-production, directly reflecting our pledge to being a good corporate parent.

In August just over a 100 people came together to celebrate the amazing achievements of children and young people in care and care leavers at the Summer Celebration event. The event was held at the LNER Community Stadium and was attended by fostering

families, care leavers and workers. It was opened, compared and closed by members and supports of the Children in Care council and Care Leavers Forum.

The day was all about celebrating children and young people in care and care leavers. We did this by hearing music recorded by a young person in care which was amazing and watching a short film produced by “next door but one” with young people on behalf of Show Me That I Matter.

Care Leavers week kicked off with a football match for York’s Care Leavers, enthusiastically supported by a local football team and the Care Leavers Forum. This event brought together many care-experienced individuals and professionals, fostering a sense of community and providing an enjoyable outlet for our talented young people. The overwhelmingly positive feedback, with many participants expressing a desire for similar future events, highlighted the success of this engaging start to the week.

Throughout the week, the Leaving Care Team facilitated workshops designed for both care-experienced individuals and professionals. These included sessions on raising awareness for foster carers, a popular cooking workshop to enhance independence skills (a direct request from the Care Leavers Forum), and a valuable pathway planning Q&A session. Such initiatives demonstrate our responsive approach to the identified needs and aspirations of our care leavers.

A significant highlight was the “We Are Stronger Together” event, which brought together professionals, foster carers, and care-experienced people to celebrate and launch key pieces of work. Notably, the new, more personalized Local Offer was launched, a project heavily influenced by the consistent consultation and design input from members of the Care Leavers Forum.

Care Leavers’ Week 2024 culminated in a vibrant celebration event at Moor Lane Youth Centre. The event was supported by local businesses, who provided catering and facilitated a fun, interactive pizza-making experience. This provided a relaxed environment. A new addition was the “wish tree” initiative, where care-experienced young people shared their Christmas gift wishes. This initiative, developed from a Care Leavers Forum discussion, underscores our ongoing efforts to bring joy and practical support to our care leavers, directly involving corporate parents in these meaningful gestures.

These events collectively showcased our holistic approach to corporate parenting, focusing on fun, skill development, direct consultation, and meaningful celebration. The positive feedback and active participation throughout Care Leavers’ Week 2024 reaffirm the strength of our commitment to our care-experienced young people.



## Helped design the 2025 U\_Matter Survey

The Corporate Parenting Board reviewed the planned 2025 U\_Matter survey. This is our largest survey for gathering feedback from children in care and care leavers. This survey, offered every two years to those aged 8 to 25, helps identify crucial issues and priorities.

The survey was developed through close working between various children's services teams and, most importantly, reviewed and approved by care-experienced young people. The board considered the final surveys in March 2025 before the survey went live on 1st April 2025. The Corporate Parenting Board will receive the responses later in 2025. This feedback will be vital in helping the Board understand the lived experiences of care-experienced young people, identify what is working well, and determine key areas for priority action.

## ■ Looking to the future

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy and the views and experiences of young people will continue to be what drives our work. This annual report shows the real benefits of meaningfully working together with young people to be the best corporate parent we can be. In 2025/26 we will focus in particular how we can bring more partners to the table so we can deliver against our priorities as corporate parents:

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