

## **Children, Culture & Communities Scrutiny Committee 5 December 2023**

Report of the Corporate Director of Children and Education

### **Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers Update**

#### **Summary**

1. This report provides an update on key elements in relation to Children and Young People in Care. Specifically:
  - i. The new Corporate Parenting Strategy;
  - ii. Key information and data relating to children and young people in care;
  - iii. Key messages from young people and how this has influenced service developments;
  - iv. Development of fostering and residential provision and the Staying Close programme.

#### **Background**

2. 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 comes into our care the tasks of their parents become the corporate responsibility of the Council. This is known as 'corporate parenting' and it is the collective responsibility of the Council to prioritise the needs of children in care and care leavers and seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children. A good corporate parent should regularly ask themselves "If this were my child, would it be good enough?"

#### **Corporate Parenting Strategy**

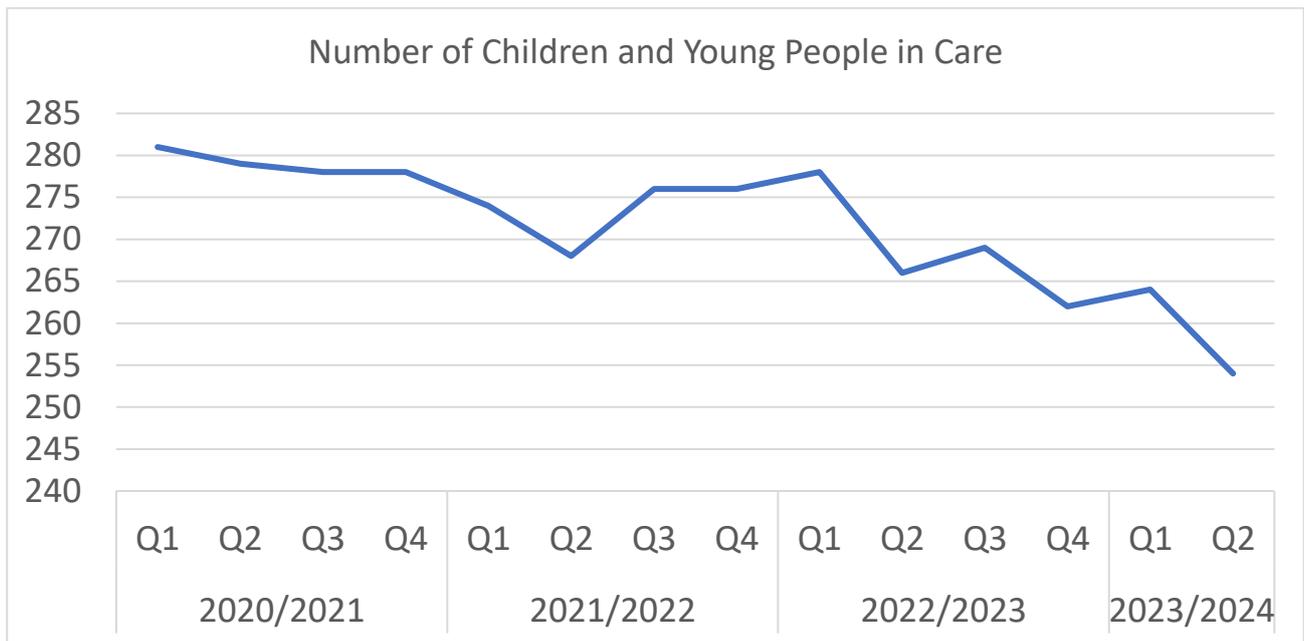
3. The Corporate Parenting Strategy for the City of York outlines our ambitions for children and young people who are looked after by us, the local authority, as their corporate parents. The strategy also sets out our long-term aspirations for care experienced young people as they become adults.

4. The Corporate Parenting Strategy was developed with input from care experienced children and young people. It was discussed by the Corporate Parenting Board in September 2023. The Corporate Parenting Strategy and supporting action plan will progress to the Council's Executive for consideration and approval.
5. The Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2024-2027 sets out the following strategic priorities:
  - i. **Where you live** - 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.
  - ii. **Family and Friends** - 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.
  - iii. **Education** - 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.
  - iv. **Health** - 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.
  - v. **Support into adulthood and independence** - 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.
  - vi. **Good corporate parents** - 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.

### Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers

6. At the end of Q2 2023/24 York had 254 children and young people in care (excluding Short Breaks). The children in care population over time is shown in the chart and table below.



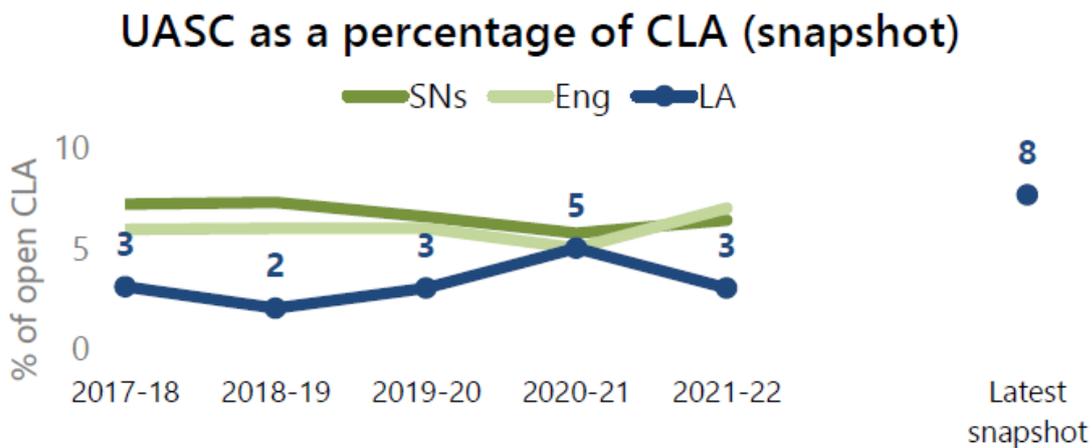
	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
2023/2024	264	254		
2022/2023	278	266	269	262
2021/2022	274	268	276	276
2020/2021	281	279	278	278

7. When comparing York to statistical neighbours we should expect to have a population of children and young people in care of between 222 and 260. We can see that we have been above this expected range for several years. We can see that hard work to support more young people to safely remain with their families and to be successfully supported to leave care is making a difference.

8. At the end of Q2 2023/24 York had 68.65 children in care per 10k of population. This is better than the regional figure of 81 per 10k and the

national figure of 71 (per 10k). However, it remains above the average of statistical neighbours (63.6 (per 10k)).

9. The chart below shows the increasing number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) within the children in care cohort. The table below shows the number of young people who were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) over time. We can see this has increased in recent years and as of the 13<sup>th</sup> November increased to 19. We are funded by the Home Office for the care of unaccompanied young people however, the funding often does not cover the costs of provision.



	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
2023/2024	16	17		
2022/2023	10	12	14	14
2021/2022	5	7	8	8

## Feedback from Young People

10. York has made a commitment to involve children and young people in the development and delivery of services. We place great value on engaging children and young people with lived experience of being in care. The involvement and participation of children and young people is seen as a real strength. There are a number of different ways that children and young people can be involved:
- i. We have developed a model of Corporate Parenting Advisors to support direct influence and attendance at the Corporate Parenting Board.
  - ii. Our Children in Care Council (Show Me That I Matter) and Care Leavers Forum (I Still Matter).

- iii. Direct involvement in the development and delivery of training.
  - iv. Involvement in interview panels for key positions.
  - v. The bi-annual U Matter Survey.
11. In recent months the quality of young people's involvement has been recognised by two national bodies:
- i. In October 2023 Show Me That I Matter and I Still Matter were shortlisted for the national Participation Award by Coram Voice.
  - ii. In November the involvement of young people in the development of Wenlock was a finalist in the Care Leavers Celebration event run by the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum.
12. The involvement of children and young people in the development of our residential provision is a notable example of positive engagement with care experienced young people. They have supported the development of the model, the recruitment of staff, branding development and had input into the design and decorating of the home itself.
13. Young people have joined forces with the fostering service and York Mumbler to raise awareness of fostering in the city. Show Me That I Matter are working with a local artist to develop a 'Snook' celebrating the work of our fostering community and encourage others to think about fostering. 'Snooks' is a new sculpture trail coming to York from late February to April 2024 and organised by Make it York and St Leonard's Hospice.
14. The U Matter Survey is a chance for children and young people in care and care leavers aged 11 + to have their say about their care experience. The survey is carried out every two years and made available to young people over a three-month period. The feedback from young people has been crucial in the development of the new Corporate Parenting Strategy and its supporting plans.
15. The Show Me That I Matter and I Still Matter annual report for 2022/23 is provided as Annex A. This provides a selection of examples of how children and young people have directly influenced the development and delivery of services.

## **Ofsted Focused Visit – Care Leavers**

16. In August 2023 Ofsted inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for care leavers. This 'focused visit' was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Inspectors were on site and met with practitioners, managers and young people.
17. The feedback following the focused visit was broadly very positive. Inspectors found that:
  - i. 'Care leavers are very well supported by staff, with whom they have stable and trusted relationships. They are supported effectively into adulthood by workers who are emotionally invested in them. Care leavers are involved from an early stage in the decisions which affect them. They are helped to understand their rights and entitlements. Those who wish to become involved in service and practice developments are actively encouraged to do so.
  - ii. Senior leaders have created a culture across the council in which care leavers are valued and are given a high priority status. Senior leaders and members are strong and active corporate parents, who are committed to improving the lives of care leavers. Leaders value opportunities to engage with young people and understand their views and perspectives, treating them as experts. This puts young people at the centre of decision-making and service development.'
18. Ofsted identified two areas of further improvement in relation to the consistency and recording of care supervision and the timely updating of pathway plans where needs change. Both of these areas are being developed and are also reflected within the action plan underpinning the new Corporate Parenting Strategy.
19. A copy of the full feedback from the focused visit can be found on the Ofsted website (<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50227341>).

### **Sufficiency Strategy Development**

20. We are currently finalising a new 'Sufficiency Strategy' covering 2024-2027. The Sufficiency Strategy sets out how City of York Council and relevant partners ensures that there are adequate and appropriate resources, facilities, and services in place to cater to the diverse needs of children in care within the community.

21. This strategy aims to identify potential gaps in provision, understand the changing demands of the population, and respond effectively to emerging challenges. By doing so, it aspires to promote inclusive, equitable, and accessible services that empower children and families to thrive, overcome obstacles, and reach their full potential.
22. In 2022 we set up a 'Make York Home' panel to review children and young people's placements. The purpose of the group is to ensure placements are appropriate and meet children's needs. All local authorities in the country face challenges in securing placements that can meet increasingly complex care needs. This has created the national issue of increasing placement costs and pressure on local authority budgets.
23. The Make York Home panel has meant we have been able to care for children in more appropriate placements and reduce our use of expensive out of areas placements. In particular reducing our need for out of area residential placements and use of Independent Fostering Agencies.
  - i. In April 2023 we had in place 35 placements with Independent Foster Agencies. By November 2023 this had reduced to 27.
  - ii. In April 2023 we had 14 children in residential placements. By November 2023 this had reduced to 10.
24. The Sufficiency Strategy plays a pivotal role in creating an environment where children can flourish. By having a structured and comprehensive strategy in place, we can:
  - i. **Prioritise Children's Needs:** The sufficiency strategy ensures that children's needs are at the forefront of decision-making processes, safeguarding their well-being and providing tailored support where required.
  - ii. **Plan for the Future:** By anticipating future needs and challenges, we can plan and allocate resources effectively, ensuring that services are sustainable and adaptable.
  - iii. **Promote Accountability and Transparency:** The strategy fosters accountability among agencies and local authorities, promoting transparency in how resources are allocated and used.

- iv. **Enable Early Intervention:** Early identification of challenges and timely intervention can prevent issues from escalating, benefiting children, families, and the broader community.
  - v. **Encourage Collaboration:** The strategy encourages collaboration between various stakeholders, including local authorities, health services, education providers, and community organisations, fostering a holistic approach to children's welfare.
  - vi. **Empower Children and Families:** By providing accessible and high-quality services, we empower children and families to actively participate in decision-making and take ownership of their well-being.
25. There is significant demand across foster care and residential placements. York is facing the same challenges as many other local authorities in developing sufficient placement provision to meet the needs of children and young people.
26. There have been significant developments in the last six months in terms of developing our residential offer. Wenlock Terrace, a 6 bed children's home is currently being developed and will provide much needed placements for young people within the city.
27. **'Together, WE Can'** is our approach to residential care which is a skilled multi-agency team supporting young people ensuring the right support at the right time. Residential care services work with young people who have complex needs, this can often mean that external provision 'give up' very easily. We believe that if we stick with young people, develop trusting relationships and make a difference on long term outcomes.
28. This new service will alleviate placement pressure and afford practitioners time and space to undertake work with family's, based on Family Seeing and Signs of Safety and together with a newly developed reunification strategy, we should see fewer young people entering care and those who do, much quicker and more supportive return home to family networks.
29. The Fostering Service has recently recruited an experienced registered manager and together with the Head of Resources and wider fostering colleagues, is undertaking a root and branch review of the service.
30. The aim of this review is to improve workstreams, efficiency and to increase the number of inhouse foster carers in York. There is

significant work being undertaken in respect of this and will require sustained commitment over a number of years.

## **Council Plan**

31. One City, for all, the City of York Council's Council Plan (2023-2027), sets a strong ambition to increase opportunities for everyone living in York to live healthy and fulfilling lives. Specific areas relating to this paper are:
  - i. 4: Start good health and wellbeing young:
    - 4.3: Continue our improvement journey to deliver good and outstanding children's services with the voice of the child heard throughout all council operations.
    - 4.4: Embed corporate parenting so children in care and care leavers can thrive.

## **Implications**

32. There is no decision related to this paper and as such no implications to consider.

## ***Risk Management***

33. No recommendations are being made by this report and as such no additional risk management is required.

## **Recommendations**

34. To note and comment upon the contents of this report.

Reason: So that members are updated on key elements in relation to Children and Young People in Care.

## Contact Details

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**Chief Officer Responsible for the report:**  
**Martin Kelly**  
Corporate Director of Children and Education

**Report**  **Date** 29 November 2023  
**Approved**

**Wards Affected:** *List wards or tick box to indicate all* **All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

## Background Papers:

### Annexes

**Annex A** – Show Me That I Matter (SMTIM) and I Still Matter (ISM) Annual Report 2022-2023

## Abbreviations

CLA – Children Looked After  
CYPIC – Children and Young People in Care  
IRO - Independent Reviewing Officer