

# City of York Council Corporate Parenting Board

Annual Report  
2022/2023



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## ■ Introducing our annual report

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

Since the local elections in May it has been a privilege and a pleasure to become Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board and I genuinely believe that this is one of the most important jobs a Councillor can hold here in York. In this role I get to oversee and help steer how we look after some of our most vulnerable people; and really hear their views about how to best provide the support that we can as a City.

I would like to thank all of the staff and members who have contributed to the work of the Corporate Parenting Board over the last year as without their efforts we wouldn't have seen the necessary transformation that we have. But I would also like to extend my particular thanks to the Young People themselves; it is down to their expertise, honesty and bravery to speak up that has driven the changes that were needed.

The Corporate Parenting Board has undergone several clear changes in the last year but the key difference that I have recognised more than any other is the increased visibility of the Young People themselves. I hope that we can make that voice heard even more over time when Young People take on the role of vice-chair in future meetings.

Finally, I was very pleased to see that other members of the Council took part in the training for Corporate Parenting at the beginning of this Municipal Cycle but I would really welcome more members to come forward and seek out training and conversations about their role as a Corporate Parent. It is not just my responsibility but every member's and I'm sure that other members recognise the importance of this responsibility. We must always ask ourselves; if this was my child, would it be good enough?

## **Corporate Parenting Advisors**

In the last year there has been such a high level of valuable change in the way that the Corporate Parenting Board listens to young people and take their views into consideration. Young people see an increased level of interest and engagement from elected members on the corporate parenting board. We now receive regular feedback and responses to issues that have been raised previously. It genuinely feels like young people are valued, heard and respected. We feel we can comfortably talk about sensitive topics we need to raise.

The recent offer from the new chair of the Corporate Parenting Board to co-chair meetings shows the level of involvement the council wants from young people and validates the importance of the young people's voices in decision making across the board. In the last year young people have had chance to have their voices heard on several topics including:

- The cost-of-living crisis and what further support is needed for care leavers who are moving towards independence, or already living independently, resulting in a cost-of-living fund being set up that can be accessed when needed.
- The local authority's housing protocol and how best CYC can support young people to have a smooth transition into adulthood/ independent living. Young peoples have resulted in policy change and a full review of the joint housing protocol.
- Responses from last U matter survey - with leaders recognising and understanding the top future priorities for young people and areas they feel need to improve.

The development of the Corporate Parenting Advisor role has also made a huge difference. It has created a bridge between young people and professionals. Young people find it helpful to have advisors who are care experienced themselves, as they feel they are genuinely understand the issues they want to raise. There have been increased training opportunities for all Corporate Parents within the local authority, helping them to understand the importance of their role and how they can best support their young people. ISM/ SMTIM also now feel more confident about inviting members of the CPB to attend their meetings as they have stated they feel listened to and they can see change from the things they have raised. This feels like a very positive position to make progress from and achieve more good things next year.

**Annie Whitley – Corporate Parenting Advisor**

## ■ Overview of 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 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?"

The **Corporate Parenting Board** provides a leadership role by championing the specific needs of children and young people who are, or have been, looked after by the local authority. It does this through working with all elected members, officers within the Council, with colleagues from partner agencies and with children and young people.

The City of York Council constitution was update in 2022. Article 20 sets out the new governance arrangements for how Corporate Parenting Board works. The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is to:

To actively listen to the views of our children and young people so that the Council is able to adapt its corporate parenting in line with their wishes, feeling and needs.

- To act as a forum where our young people are able to hold Members and Officers to account as their parents.
- To raise the awareness of the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities and knowledge among elected Members and officers.
- To support and make recommendations to relevant Council bodies on matters related to corporate parenting.

Collectively, we are fully committed to being the best parent we can be to our children. This annual report sets out the key activity and outcomes achieved in 2022/23.



## ■ Progress towards Corporate Parenting Objectives

Our Corporate Parenting and Children in Care Strategy sets out our ambition for our children and young people and care leavers and how we intend to fulfil our corporate parenting responsibilities and strategic priorities in a way which puts children and young people and care leavers at the centre of improvements in the planning, delivery and evaluation of our services.

### **Objective 1 – Our Children and Young People have a voice in the way we deliver our services and we will act upon what they tell us**

The Ofsted inspection of children’s services in March 2022 noted that young people reported not being sufficiently listened to by corporate parents. The report recognised work was already under way to strengthen the involvement of children and young people including their direct attendance at the Corporate Parenting Board.

#### **In 2022/23:**

- The updated council constitution made clear the commitment to ensuring children and young people had a voice and were heard. This meant care experienced young people being supported to directly attend the meetings and take part. The structure of the meetings was adapted to reflect feedback from young people about how they wanted to see them run.
- We have continued to fund the role of Corporate Parenting Advisors in 2022/23 to help gain the unique insights of people with care experience. These advisors play a vital link in gathering the views and experiences of children and young people and directly attend the Corporate Parenting Board.
- Corporate Parenting Advisors have developed and delivered corporate parenting training to elected members and staff across housing. Following the local elections in May the Director of Children’s Service and Corporate Parenting Advisor jointly delivered a briefing on corporate parenting as part of induction for all councillors.
- Show Me That I Matter and I Still Matter are the groups that make up York’s Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum. The groups give young people in care and care leavers the opportunity to share their views and help shape and influence the services and policies that affect them and other children and young people in and leaving care.

- In 2022/23 a total of 56 children and young people have been engaged in some shape or other through the work of the groups. This represents 22% of care experienced young people in York. This group has played an important role in young people being able to share their views and be heard. A full annual report for these group is available and a summary of key areas of development in the last year is shown below.
  - » **My Things Matter** – Following direct feedback from young people the City of York Council has now signed up to the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) ‘My Things Matter’ pledge. This pledge is a commitment about how young people’s belongings would be treated if they need to move.
  - » **Independent Care Review** - York’s Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum had their say last year about the proposed changes to improve Social Care for Children across the UK as part of the Independent Care Review. This included young people attending an event at Parliament to share directly with decision makers the views of care experienced children from York.
  - » **Care Plan Documents** - Show Me That I Matter have had their say in creating a template Care Plan for Children and Young People in Care. This means young people will have their own copy of their plan, written and displayed in a way which is appropriate for them and contains everything they need to know. Young people decided what content was needed, how it should be worded and what these should look like.

**In 2022/23 the Corporate Parenting Board is able to demonstrate clear action as a result of input from children and young people.**

- » **Housing** – Following feedback from care experienced young people the Corporate Parenting Board directed the development of a Care Experienced Young People Housing Protocol. The final version of this protocol was considered by the Corporate Parenting Board in March 2023 and is now in place.
- » **Cost of living** - Corporate Parenting Advisors gathered views from care experienced young people about the impact of the cost of living crisis. The Corporate Parenting Board directed action to support care experienced young people to access additional support. This included creating a dedicated fund of £50k to support care experienced young people at this time.
- » **UMatter** – The U Matter survey is undertaken with children in care or with care experience once every two years. The last survey was undertaken in 2021 and the Corporate Parenting Board has had oversight of the action plan addressing the points raised by children and young people.
- » **Local Offer** – The Corporate Parenting Advisors presented the views of young people around the current Local Offer for children leaving care. In 2022 the Local Offer document was updated with information reflecting input from young people.

## **Objective 2 - Children and Young People in York can remain safely at home**

We aim to provide the right support at the right time for children and young people to keep them safe at home.

In the last year we have worked hard to create more stability and consistency in the intervention we provide to families and their and have developed ways to manage and progress safety plans to keep children at home. We are inviting more family members to meetings and including them in safety planning.

We have seen a reduction in the number of court proceedings we have issued and also an increased use of pre-proceedings to ensure that work and intervention is in place in a timely way and to prevent children being removed from home wherever possible. Developing positive relationships with families early on in our involvement helps build trust and we can talk through important and challenging issues in order to create safety and well-being for children at home. Direct work with children and giving them the chance to talk openly to safe people inside and outside of their home means quicker and more meaningful responses through a multi-agency plan.

We will continue work with our social work teams and our partner to ensure that we implement and use our model of practice to provide consistent and supportive intervention for families to ensure children are safe. Signs of Safety is providing a platform for us to develop our analysis of risk and safety and also ensure children, parents and their networks have an understanding of what the worries are and how we are going to work together to address them.

In addition, the Corporate Parenting Board considered the Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report. The board explored with the Head of One Adoption North and Humber the reasons behind reducing numbers coming forward to adopt across the region, challenges within care proceedings, and how long some children wait to be adopted.

## **Objective 3 - Our Care Leavers in York have a comprehensive 'Local Offer'**

The Corporate Parenting Board had oversight of developments to the Local Offer for Care Leavers. The 'Local Offer' for care leavers which sets out practical support for care-experienced young people as they move into independence. The Local Offer was strengthened based on feedback received from our care-experienced young people. Notable improvements include enhanced accommodation options, increased weekly allowances aligned with inflation, and the inclusion of gym membership and swimming lessons.

Efforts have been made to improve communication and understanding of the Local Offer, and it will undergo a more in-depth review in 2023. Additionally, the Corporate Parenting Board aims to be more ambitious in supporting care-experienced young people, focusing on areas such as apprenticeships, health, and building important relationships.

Financial support for care-experienced young people has been facilitated through the creation of a dedicate cost-of-living fund.

In relation to council tax, discussions are ongoing to explore a graduated exemption for care-experienced young people, taking into account their views and benchmarking against other local authorities.

The Corporate Parenting Board remains dedicated to providing exceptional care and support to children in our care and care leavers. The ongoing development of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, along with improvements to the Local Offer and other key areas, reflects our commitment to continually enhancing the lives of care-experienced young people.

#### **Objective 4 – Children and Young People will be supported in their Education, Employment and Training**

The Corporate Parenting Board reviewed the annual report of the Virtual School Head. The annual report provided a summary of the Virtual School cohort for the academic year 2021/22.

The strengths and areas for improvement identified through the Virtual School's self-evaluation were discussed. These included Personal Education Plans (PEPs), cohort summary, attendance, suspensions/exclusions, placement moves, collaborative working, outcome data, and analysis. The Board was informed that attendance for children and young people in care in school figures for Years 1 to 11 had increased from 85% to 89.5% in the 2022/23 academic year, with a reduction in persistent absence across the cohorts.

The Corporate Parenting Board was encouraged to see an improving percentage of children in care aged 3-18 with a Personal Education Plan updated within the last 6 months. At the end of 2022/23 this stood at 89.79% compared to 77.16% at the end of 2021/22.

The Corporate Parenting Board has agreed to make education for children and young people in care a priority. The Virtual School Head has now joined as a permanent member of the Corporate Parenting Board.

#### **Objective 5 – Children and Young People will have a suitable place to live and be cared for, secured through timely permanence planning**

We are continuing to work with children, their families and their networks to support children at home.

Where we cannot support a child remaining safely with their parents, we aim to plan alongside them and their network to find the best alternative to develop safety and aim for children to be reunited with their parents at home wherever possible.

Early discussions with children and their parents during our initial assessments, multiagency meetings and interventions mean that we will get to know who is important to them and who is available to be there to support a child and keep them safe.

Work is being completed in pre-proceedings to identify potential alternative plans for children and parallel planning so that delays in court will be reduced and stability and long-term planning can be decided at the earliest possible time.

Having a tight network of support in place for families means that if concerns escalate or we cannot find the safety we need at home we already have links and a relationship with those around them to help them plan for next steps. Safety plans and family arrangements for children are more effective when developed by the family themselves and we continue to support them not only with immediate risk and planning but long-term permanent and stable plans for children who cannot remain at home.

In the last year there has been increased focus and support around children placed with parents or under special guardianship orders. There is an increased focus on developing different permanence options and we expect to see the impact of this in 2023/24. The sufficiency of suitable places to live and the further development of permanence planning remains a priority into the next year.

### **Objective 6 – The Health and Wellbeing of our Children and Young People will be a priority for City of York Council**

Performance in relation to Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) is shared at every Corporate Parenting Board. An Initial Health Assessment (IHA) is a comprehensive evaluation conducted when a child or young person enters the care of the Local Authority. It aims to assess their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, identify any pre-existing health conditions or specific needs, and develop a personalized care plan to ensure they receive appropriate medical care and support during their time in care.

The Corporate Parenting Board is aware of the challenges and factors contributing to low performance in completing IHAs on time. These challenges included delays in receiving requests from social care and scheduling paediatric appointments.

Over the course of 2022/23 the number of IHAs completed within 20 working days has increased. This improvement is attributed to the positive impact of weekly meetings between Children's Service and Health, facilitating prompt initiation of necessary actions for children and young people entering the care of the Local Authority.

Efforts within social work teams have also focused on obtaining up-to-date health information for children entering care to ensure they receive the necessary support. These discussions are now integral to pre-placement considerations and ongoing reviews.

The Corporate Parenting Board understands the importance of involving children and young people in the development and improvement of the IHA process. Consultations with York's Children in Care Council have been conducted, and the plan is to continue gathering feedback from care-experienced young people. This feedback will inform the development of flow charts and processes to support and encourage their participation in IHA appointments.

The Corporate Parenting Board is assured by stronger performance in relation to Review Health Assessments, which remains under close attention. At the end of 2022/23, the percentage of children and young people in care for more than one year with an up-to-date health assessment was 90.54%. This exceeds the national average of 89.00% and the figure for statistical neighbours, which stands at 87.80%. Similarly, 79.28% of children in care for more than one year had an up-to-date dental check, surpassing the national figure of 70.00% and the statistical neighbours' rate of 67.40%, albeit slightly lower than the previous year's performance of 85.91%.

The Corporate Parenting Board is committed to improving the performance of Initial Health Assessments while involving children and young people in the process. The report highlights both the challenges faced and the positive steps taken to enhance the timeliness and quality of IHAs, with the aim of providing the best possible support to children and young people in care.

The Virtual School has a Specialist Inclusion and Wellbeing Adviser who provides consultation for staff in schools and early years settings to identify SEMH needs in children and young people in care. Strategies and approaches bespoke to that individual child are then identified in order to support their readiness to learn. In the last year specifically, this role has extended in order to include partnership working with carers and CSC staff. It also provides a level of consultancy for CSC staff so that resources/approaches around supporting the SEMH needs of children in care, can be shared more widely.

The Specialist Inclusion and Well-being Adviser works closely with the School Wellbeing Service to provide joint consultation where necessary to ensure the child/young person accesses the right support/intervention.

Work has begun to develop our approach residential and outreach support through Wenlock Terrace and having secured funds to launch a Staying Close model. We have secured ongoing committed funding for one full-time Clinical Psychologist and a part-time Speech and Language Therapist to support this provision. They have been funded by health but will be managed by Children's Social Care.

The role of the Clinical Psychologist is to work closely with the Outreach and Residential Care Practitioners to support young people and their families to repair, restore and sustain relationships, with the principle aim of young people remaining or returning to the care of their family networks.

The Clinical Psychology provision will also provide direct support under the Staying Close provision, ensuring that pathway planning to independence is underpinned by strong formulation and that young people's overall mental health and well-being needs are understood, appropriately met and that they have access to services within their local communities. This is dedicated Clinical Psychology provision to young people leaving care and will provide a responsive and person-centred approach to enabling young people to be successful.

To support the success of this new role, we are further investing in our Clinical Psychology provision with the recruitment of a Consultant Clinical Psychologist to work across children's services, with a particular focus on safeguarding. This is a senior specialist clinical role that will provide professional supervision and work closely with teams in the identification and management of risk in line with our Signs of Safety practice model.

## **Objective 7 - Our Children and Young People are protected from harm and/or Risk of Exploitation**

The City of York has Children's Social Care has a specialist Children Missing and Exploitation Team. The aim of the team is to identify children most at risk of exploitation in the City and provide support and intervention to reduce the risk of harm/exploitation, with a strong ethos of direct work and engagement with young people, their families and working within their networks.

The team work closely, alongside Police, Health, Education, Youth Justice Service colleagues and the community safeguarding partnership. As well as supporting young people who are at risk of or experiencing exploitation, Children Missing and Exploitation Team support Social Care by raising awareness of exploitation, providing key role in learning and development, hosting group supervision, and working alongside teams to improve responses to exploitation.

Children Missing and Exploitation Team are pivotal in addressing concerns in respect of contextual safeguarding. The service manager of the team works closely with multiagency partners; chairing the Multi Agency Child Exploitation Meeting, Risk Assessment Meeting and National Referral Mechanism meetings. This ensures the consistent sharing of information in respect of contextual safeguarding and contributing to the disruption of perpetrators or persons of concern.

The City of York are signed up to a joint protocol with North Yorkshire County Council and North Yorkshire Police in respect of Children who go missing from Home and Care. City of York respond promptly to incidents where children go missing, with the Volunteer Service completing return from home interviews on situations where the young person is known to Children's Services or Early Help. This ensures the young person has an independent person to share their worries with. Children Missing and Exploitation Team and the Volunteer Service work closely together, sharing information about contextual safeguarding concerns and ensuring these are discussed at the Multi Agency Child Exploitation Meeting, to pull together actions with partners across the Safeguarding Partnership to disrupt contextual safeguarding concerns. Following our Ofsted inspection in 2022 we have developed training on the return interview process for all practitioners and service managers to ensure that information is better analysed and used to inform planning for children. In addition to this, our in-house volunteer team now creates a monthly data report looking at all missing episodes to track data trends and identify patterns.

Weekly missing meetings are held between Children's Social Care and North Yorkshire Police reviewing all missing episodes within that week to quickly identify emerging issues and concerns.

Monthly missing meetings are held between Childrens Social Care and North Yorkshire Police review children who have been missing five occasions or more times within 90 days and ensuring appropriate multi-agency oversight of missing plans and sharing of information.

### **Objective 8 - Children and Young People in our Care and Care leavers' achievements are celebrated**

In the last 12 months there have been a number of events and forums created to ensure that Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers across our local authority feel that their successes are appropriately celebrated and their achievements recognised in a meaningful way.

Fun and engaging events held on National Care Day and during Care Leavers Week in 2023 were well attended and focused on celebrating young people's achievements – with social workers, pathway workers and advocates invited to attend, as members of the CYC village of workers who support young people's journeys. Elected members and leaders have attended these events and joined in fun activities including bake off competitions. Young people have also been consulted as part of these events.

Young people have been nominated for awards both internally and externally, with nominations made for young people in the 'Amplify' National Voice Awards and Community Pride Awards for their outstanding work. Young people who have engaged with advocacy work had their work submitted and published in the launch edition of 'Change through Advocacy', an annual publication created by children, young people and advocates, with support from the Article 39 team.

Young people who offer their time and experience to support interview panels or attend the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers forums have been provided certificates to acknowledge their work and the value of their involvement recognised through stamps which add up to a small reward.

### **Future priorities and new Corporate Parenting Strategy**

The Corporate Parenting Board has actively collaborated with children and young people to fulfil our responsibilities as corporate parents. Through meaningful engagement, we have strived to ensure that the council and our partners meet the needs and rights of children in our care and care leavers. In line with our commitment to continuous improvement, a new Corporate Parenting Strategy is currently being developed. This strategy will establish our strategic priorities, aiming to provide the best possible care and support for children and young people in our care and as they transition into adulthood.



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Publication date: October 2023

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