

Children, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Committee 3 December 2024

Report of the Corporate Director of Children and Education

Corporate Parenting Annual Report – 2023/24

Summary

1. This report presents the 2023/24 Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board (Annex A). It highlights our progress in achieving the aspirations outlined in the Corporate Parenting Strategy and reflects on the Board's work over the past year.

Background

2. There is arguably no greater responsibility the council holds than as corporate parent to children and young people in care. We are dedicated to York being an effective, caring, and ambitious corporate parent. Our goal is to ensure that children in our care and care leavers receive the highest standard of care and support.
3. City of York Council provides care for children and young people who are unable to remain with their parents. When a child comes into our care, the Council assumes the role of a corporate parent. This means we are responsible for ensuring these children receive the same care, support, and opportunities that any loving parent would provide. A good corporate parent always asks: "If this were my child, would this be good enough?"
4. The Corporate Parenting Board leads this vital work, focusing on the needs of children and young people in care, as well as those who have left care. The Board collaborates with Council members, staff, partner organisations, and the children and young people themselves to champion their needs and ensure their well-being.

5. The 2023/24 Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board is provided as Annex A. It is important to note that this highlights our progress in 2023/24 but does not include more recent achievements. The 2024/25 Annual Report will include progress in relation to:
 - a. The council's commitment to treat care experience as if it was a protected characteristic.
 - b. The work of the corporate parenting sub-groups (health, housing and education) which are currently being piloted.
 - c. The 'Mind your language' campaign. This is in response to how we speak about and to young people and the impact of our language.
 - d. Our new Enhanced Offer for Care Leavers.
 - e. The broader delivery of our Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Co-Production

6. In recent years we have taken clear steps to strengthen young people's voice and influence in how we work as Corporate Parents. This includes developing an award-winning model of care experienced 'Corporate Parenting Advisors' to help young people have a voice and be heard.
7. Our Corporate Parenting Board is now co-chaired with care experienced people. As co-chairs, Lauren and Owen have provided a foreword to the Corporate Parenting Annual Report reflecting their views on progress over the last year.
8. As well as young people co-chairing the Corporate Parenting Board we know we have good opportunities for children and young people to share their views and help us design services. 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. In addition, we work together with young people to support specific projects, training, recruitment, regional events, national events and our now regular programme of celebration events. In 2023/24 over 50 care experienced young people have been supported to share their views through these forums.

9. Last year we introduced our new All Together Active group for care experienced young people that want more active and social activities. This is working as a great tool to introduce more young people into other participation groups. Below is a summary of some of the key themes we have been able to support young people to be involved in:
 - a. The advisory group for mental health.
 - b. Working with the fostering team on foster carer recruitment and training.
 - c. Sharing experiences of having an Independent Visitor.
 - d. Developing our approach to Protected Characteristics.
 - e. Building on the work to further improve the joint housing protocol for care leavers.
 - f. Input into the leaving care offer.
 - g. The co-production of 'Project Wenlock' - our new residential offer for children and young people.
 - h. Supported young people to share their views around the importance of language in sessions with all children's services staff and the safeguarding partnership.

Council Plan

10. One City, for all, the City of York Council's Council Plan (2023-2027), sets out the council's vision and priorities. Our corporate parenting responsibilities can be seen to run through all seven priority areas.
 - a. Health and wellbeing: A health generating city, for children and adults
 - b. Education and skills: High quality skills and learning for all
 - c. Economy and good employment: A fair, thriving, green economy for all
 - d. Transport: Sustainable accessible transport for all
 - e. Housing: Increasing the supply of affordable housing
 - f. Sustainability: Cutting carbon, enhancing the environment for our future
 - g. How the council operates

11. The Council Plan also makes direct reference to our role as Corporate Parents and the actions we will take.
 - a. 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.
 - b. 4.4. Embed corporate parenting so children in care and care leavers can thrive.
 - c. 5.2. Review the fostering service, including the support to foster carers and kinship carers.
12. In 2023/24, we launched a new Corporate Parenting Strategy. This strategy sets out our goals for children and young people in care, as well as our long-term ambitions for care-experienced young people as they transition to adulthood. A copy of the Corporate Parenting Strategy has been provided in Annex B.
13. Although there is no direct statutory obligation to create a Corporate Parenting Board, local authorities are required to have mechanisms in place to fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities. The establishment of a Corporate Parenting Board is widely recognised as a best-practice approach to meet these statutory duties by:
 - a. Overseeing our corporate parenting responsibilities.
 - b. Ensuring that the Corporate Parenting principles are embedded in practice.
 - c. Driving forward our local Corporate Parenting Strategy for children in our care and care leavers.
 - d. Providing a platform for collaboration with children, young people, and partners.
14. In November the government published 'Keeping children safe, helping families thrive' (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-helping-families-thrive>). This policy statements sets out the governments proposals for reform of the social care system. The paper includes a wide range of reforms. Of relevance to this report are proposals to extend corporate parenting responsibilities to partners.
 - a. "We plan to extend corporate parenting responsibilities to government departments and relevant public bodies to create a culture change in which we realise our shared ambition to support

children in care and care leavers. In this role, all “corporate parents” can help to break down barriers to good outcomes for care experienced children and young people in different ways, for example, by: ensuring that relevant policies and services that impact on children in care and care leavers’ lives take account of their additional needs and circumstances; taking steps to reduce the stigma or discrimination they face; or providing additional support as a parent or family member might.”

15. We are confident the steps we are already taking locally to include partners on the Corporate Parenting Board and the recent decision to treat care experience as if it was a protected characteristic puts us in a good position to respond to this policy direction. We will support care experienced young people to be engaged in the development of the new policy wherever possible and will ensure York takes any opportunities to strengthen our role as a good and caring corporate parent.

Implications

16. Given there are no decisions to be made in relation to this paper there are no applicable implications to review.

Risk Management

17. There are no specific risks identified within this report. The Corporate Parenting Board oversees the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. Risks are managed through this board and the associated actions plans drive forward different parts of the strategy.

Recommendations

18. To note and comment upon the Corporate Parenting Annual report for 2023/24.

Reason: So that members are updated on the work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Contact Details

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Report

Approved

Date

22 November 2024

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

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes

Annex A: Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2023-24

Annex B: Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027