
Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board

Chair of Committee: Jane Lock

Executive Member: Councillor Heather Shearer, Lead Member for Children, Families and Education

Local Member and Division affected: All

Executive Director: Claire Winter, Executive Director - Children's Services

Executive Summary

The Somerset Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) meets quarterly to take reports from its four sub-groups on progress to improving the lives of children and young people in care. It is also responsible for making sure that the aims of the Somerset's Corporate Parenting Strategy are met.

In 2023-2024 children looked after, care leavers, their carers and the services that support them in Somerset have faced challenges around dental care; changes to housing arrangements; difficulties recruiting volunteers to be Independent Visitors; education restructures and cost of living issues.

Staff in Children's Social Care and its partners have operated in a climate of financial difficulties and restructuring within local government and health organisations. Additionally, children coming into local authority care are presenting with more complex needs and complicated circumstances.

The CPB has strived for assurance that our young people's experiences and needs have been understood and met during this transformational period. We also want to ensure those needs shape our local conversation and actions about how we ensure that the changes in Somerset enable more opportunities for our young people and the people who care for them, to thrive and become confident young adults with good prospects and stable lives.

Recommendations

1. That Council recommends a continued focus on expanded corporate parenting responsibility following the recommendations of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) in May 2024 – see Background Papers.
2. That Council supports and promotes a whole council approach to create practical and specific offers following the decision to view Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic

3. That Council extends its thanks to the Somerset Care Council's young people for all the hard work that they undertake.

Reasons for Proposals

To ensure that the aims of the Somerset's Corporate Parenting Strategy are met.

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Background and purpose of report

1. The role of the Somerset Corporate Parenting Board is to ensure that Somerset Council fulfils its duties towards children looked after (CLA) and care leavers; corporately and in partnership with other statutory agencies, including the NHS and Police. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025 and Terms of Reference (TOR), including membership of the Corporate Parenting Board, clearly define roles and responsibilities.
2. The Corporate Parenting Board has met quarterly throughout the year, receiving regular updates from officers, partners and the Somerset in Care Council (SiCC) and Somerset Leaving Care Council (SLCC) who are a representative group of young people looked after or leaving care and are supported by a Participation Worker (see Appendix B for their report). The voice of the child is a key aspect of the Strategy, and the Board has continued to engage with young people, both through their representation on the Board, and through SiCC and SLCC which is well established and has an effective and regular link with the Board.
3. The Council's corporate parenting arrangements were reviewed following May 2022 Local Elections to ensure Somerset continues to provide a robust Corporate Parenting approach. Currently, ten elected members are committed to the Board.
4. Full council in May 2023 approved the motion to treat and support people with Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic; actions throughout this year have been put in place to ensure that this happens in a robust and meaningful way.
5. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025 sets out how Somerset intends to fulfil its responsibilities against the Seven Principles of Corporate Parenting in a way that puts children and young people at the centre of improvements in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of our services. It forms the framework in which Somerset staff, elected members, and relevant partners work.
6. Promotion of the Seven Principles of Corporate Parenting:

To thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. The corporate parenting principles set out Seven Principles (identified in section one of the Children and Social Work Act 2017) that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people as follows:

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.

- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
 - To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
 - To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
 - To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
 - For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
 - To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
7. These principles form the structure of our actions and guide the decisions and challenges we make as a board.
8. The focus of the Corporate Parenting Board is on the delivery of five priorities covering placement sufficiency and stability, education, health, voice of the child and leaving care through well-established sub-groups with good cross agency working, led by a senior officer, and supported by a councillor from the Board.
9. Additionally, this year the Board received reports on the health, wellbeing, and achievements of the Children Looked After cohort in Somerset; and following this, a decision to hold the autumn thematic workshop focussed on the younger children in our care.
10. Additionally, the key areas of foster carer development and achieving permanence are led by the council's fostering and adoption services. Action owners on the groups take responsibility for issues to deliver solutions within deadlines.
11. The outcomes of this work are reported quarterly through the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) performance reporting arrangements, against four improvement programmes. Reports are complemented by detailed data and performance measures provided to the Board to support them in their role in leading and challenging service delivery.
12. This report provides an update of the function and impact of the Board over the past 12 months.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

13. There is no budget allocated to the function of the Somerset Corporate Parenting Board.
14. Corporate Parenting responsibilities cover the health, education and care of children looked after and care leavers – associated costs linked to the Council's plan, medium-term financial plan, and the Children's Transformation Plan.

Other options considered.

15. N/A

Key considerations for the Council

16. Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

- Achievements 2023-2024 (see Appendix A): this information evaluates the progress against the annual priorities set for 2023/24.
- The Board has continued to meet virtually via Teams at a time when members of the Care Councils can join the meeting after school or college.
- The chair of the Corporate Parenting Board is a member of the Partnership Business Group of the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership. The group reports to and aligns to the Safeguarding priorities and those of the Children & Young People's Plan 2022–2024.
- The chair especially wishes to highlight the many positive outcomes from the work of the Board and sub-groups especially:
- Refreshed Initial Health Assessment (IHA) with correct consent.
- Funding found to extend the Speech and Language Therapy post.
- Two thematic workshops held – Children Going Missing and Emotional and Mental Health and Wellbeing.
- 75.5% of children who have been in care for more than one year having an up-to-date dental assessment recorded.
- A multi-agency Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) conference was held in November 2023 with work ongoing in developing a UASC IHA pathway.
- In March 2024, Route1 Advocacy service received their 1000th referral for advocacy since April 1st, 2023, beating last year's annual number of 944.

- The Route1 team made it to the final shortlist for the Frontline Award for Team of the Year.
- Associate member for Housing now a member of the CPB and housing representatives now on the Leaving Care subgroup.
- NHS England has signed the Care Leavers Covenant (CLC) and in Somerset this has resulted in a residential for care leavers and supported employment opportunities.
- Virtual School (VS) adopted new Ways of Working from September 2023, including targeted support for those children and young people needing more involvement.
- VS linked Lead Advisory Teachers to each of the four areas across the county as part of the newly formed Area Inclusion Partnerships.
- An Inclusion Advice Line has been set up to access a Virtual School Advisory Teacher all day, Monday – Friday during term time.
- Despite the increasing rates of suspension for the whole of Somerset's children, suspensions for CLA have remained static.
- The VS has supported the Somerset Informed Trauma programme, working with Somerset Education Psychology Service.
- 'Quality Checkers' project to support CLA and Care Leavers to undertake quality assurance (QA) visits to children's homes.
- A new 16+ Accommodation service – Thrive 16+ - has been implemented and mobilised.
- The Staying Close project to support young people leaving residential care was launched and implemented.
- A robust 5-year sufficiency strategy has been written to improve sufficiency of homes for children in care and care leavers.
- Roll out of the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and other training schemes to support independent living with good take up from Care Leavers.

Consultation and feedback

16.N/A

Financial and Risk Implications

17. There are no direct financial implications to the Council from agreeing this report.

Current Risk Score:

There are no high risks identified and any low risks due to actions being carried forward have been mitigated or are in hand – as per the Corporate Parenting Action Plan shown in Appendix A of the Annual report.

Likelihood	2	Impact	2	Risk Score	4
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Projected risk score if recommended actions are agreed and delivered:

Likelihood	2	Impact	2	Risk Score	4
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Legal and Procurement Implications

18. There are no direct legal and procurement implications to the Council from agreeing this report.

HR / Workforce Implications

19. There are no direct HR/Workforce implications to the Council from agreeing this report.

Equalities Implications

20. There are no direct equalities implications to the Council from agreeing this report.

Community Safety Implications

21. There are no direct community safety implications to the Council from agreeing this report.

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

22. There are no direct financial implications to the Council from agreeing this report.

Health and Safety Implications

23. There are no direct health and safety implications to the Council from agreeing this report.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

24. There are no direct health and wellbeing implications to the Council from agreeing this report.

Social Value

25. There are no direct social value implications to the Council from agreeing this report'.

Background Papers

See attached: Somerset Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2023-24.

Link to [APPG recommendations](#) to expand Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

Appendices

Somerset Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2023-24.

Report assurance

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	18.9.24
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	18.9.24
Workforce (*)	Dawn Bettridge	18.9.24
Asset Management (*)	Oliver Woodhams	18.9.24
Executive Director	Claire Winter	18.9.24