

North Somerset Council

Report to the Council

Date of Meeting: 10 November 2020

Subject of Report: Corporate Parenting Responsibilities

Town or Parish: N/A

Officer/Member Presenting: Executive Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning

Key Decision: No

Reason:

Not an Executive Decision

Recommendations

Members are asked to consider

- whether they consider these results would be 'good enough' for their own children
- if there are any aspects that they would want to know more about

1. Summary of Report

- 1.1 The report provides members with the results of the latest annual survey of our children and young people who are in our care. North Somerset Council worked with the University of Bristol and Coram Voice to pilot the survey some years ago and we have continued to participate as it has been rolled out across many other local authorities. The survey is part of the Bright Spots Programme which is a collaboration between Coram Voice and the University of Oxford, funded by the Hadley Trust.
- 1.2 Currently official statistics only provide a partial picture of children in care and care leavers' lives such as their educational results and where they live. This doesn't tell us about how children feel; are they happy, safe and feel they are doing well? The Bright Spots programme seeks to address these gaps by measuring children's subjective well-being which is defined as 'feeling good and doing well at an individual and inter-personal level'.
- 1.3 The programme helps local authorities to listen systematically to our children in care and care leavers about the things that are important to them. It has developed a set of indicators that are measured through the survey which is grounded in research and comparable to national data sets. The indicators put children's experience and voices at the heart of how the programme measures subjective well-being. It identifies the areas where children appear to be flourishing and where things could be improved, providing an evidence base of children's experience and well-being to inform service improvements.

2. Policy

2.1 Whilst the concept of members viewing themselves as the parents of all children who are looked after came from the Quality Protects initiative launched in 1998 by Frank Dobson, the then Secretary of State for Health, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 defined for the first time in law the responsibility of corporate parents to ensure, as faster as possible, secure, nurturing and positive experiences for 'our' children. This means that they should:

- act in their best interests, and promote their physical and mental health and wellbeing;
- encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings, and take them into account, while promoting high aspirations and trying to secure the best outcomes for them;
- make sure they have access to services;
- make sure that they are safe, with stable home lives, relationships and education or work;
- prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

3. Details

3.1 **Overview of the Your Life, Your Care Survey 2020:**

- It seeks the views of children aged 4 - 18 who are in the care of North Somerset Council (NSC) on their well-being.
- 87 children and young people completed the survey (49%) in March/April this year, just as we went into lockdown – this was a good response rate, especially in the 4 – 7 years age range which was 100%.

3.2 **Key points**

- There has been an improvement on the majority of indicators since last year's survey.
- The majority of children and young people gave responses that suggested they had moderate to high well-being. About 40% of young people (11-18yrs) had very high well-being: a larger proportion compared to looked after young people in other local authorities.

3.3 **What's going well**

Trusting Relationships

- Relationships with carers are very good and it is a Bright Spot of practice.
- All the children aged 4-11yrs and 94% of young people (11-18yrs) trusted their carers.
- Most children and young people had a trusted adult in their lives: just two did not.

Social workers

- The proportion of young people who had kept the same social worker during the year has increased significantly since last year: up from 30% to 55%. It was also better than the average response in other local authorities where 34% had one worker in the year. This is a Bright Spot of practice.
- Most children and young people in NSC trusted their social worker

- Children, especially the 4-7yrs group, felt they had been helped to understand why they were in care. A larger proportion of 4-7yrs felt an adult had explained why they were in care compared to children in other local authorities. This is a Bright Spot of practice
- Children aged 8-18yrs were asked, 'Do you feel included in the decisions that social workers make about your life?' 95% of 8-11yrs 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' felt included. This age group felt included more than the average response in other local authorities where 84% felt included. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

Home environment

- Overall, 94% of children and young people reported that they 'always' felt safe in their placements: a larger proportion compared to those in the general population and a Bright Spot of practice.
- Most felt their carers were interested in their education and helped them learn life skills: 90% of 8-11yrs and 92% of 11-18yrs. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

General

- Children and young people in NSC were more likely to live with a pet compared to looked after children in other local authorities.
- We were particularly pleased to see Bright Spots in areas we had identified for improvement following last year's survey.

3.4 Areas where children would like us to make some improvements

Feeling Different

- Staff wearing ID badges when out with young people was still an issue but the numbers complaining had reduced to just 3 young people
- Many children and young people wanted more family time with their brothers/sisters
- One child and three young people did not have a good friend. (There is now a question on each Personal Education Plan (PEP) to ask about friendships and on the consultation form used by our Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing Officers (ISROs) who review the progress of children's care plans)

School

- 67% of young people (11-18yrs) liked school 'a lot' or 'a bit' – a smaller proportion compared to 80% of peers in the general population who like school
- 2 children (8-11yrs) and 8 young people (11-18yrs) in NSC were afraid to go to school because of bullying. Reports of bullying have decreased since last year. (There is also now a question on PEP and ISRO consultation form to help monitor this).

Low well being

We have a few children with low well being

- 2 children aged 4 – 7 felt sad
- 1 child age 8 – 11 described themselves as 'sad'
- 5 young people gave responses that suggested low wellbeing in the 11 – 18 age group: 2 girls and 3 boys. Young people with low well-being also tended to report that they:
 - Worried about their feelings
 - Disliked their appearance
 - Didn't talk to carers regularly about things that mattered to them

We are going to discuss what we can do to help improve these three areas during a workshop in November, to see if we can share some ideas of what works to help children who are worried about their feelings, who dislike their appearance and who don't talk to their carers about what matters to them.

We are going to do the Your Life Beyond Care Survey with our care experienced young people in November.

Coram Voice have written up two case studies to share nationally as good practice on what we have done to improve 'children's understanding of why they have come into care' and the 'stability of social workers.'

4. Consultation

4.1 This report gives members the outcome of our annual survey of our children and young people which of itself is a consultation.

5. Financial Implications

None.

Costs

None.

Funding

None.

6. Legal Powers and Implications

None.

7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

None.

8. Risk Management

None.

9. Equality Implications

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? No.

10. Corporate Implications

None.

11. Options Considered

None.

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Appendix:

'Your Life, Your Care: a survey of the views of looked after children and young people aged 4-18yrs in North Somerset', June 2020.

Background Papers:

None.