

# North Somerset Council

## Report to Council

**Date of Meeting: 09/01/24**

**Subject of Report: Corporate Parenting**

**Town or Parish:**

**Officer/Member Presenting: Councillor Catherine Gibbons**

**Key Decision: No**

### **Reason:**

This is an update and overview regarding Corporate Parenting including oversight of where children in care live, our fostering service and the role of elected members.

### **Recommendations**

To continue our commitment to the role of corporate parent to our children in care and care experienced young people.

To consider our corporate parenting role when making all key decisions.

### **1. Summary of Report**

Acting as a corporate parent for our children and young people is an important responsibility in North Somerset. Corporate parents must seek to ensure supportive relationships where young people feel cared for, not just looked after.

Good corporate parenting involves championing the rights of children in care and care experienced young people and ensuring that they have access to good services and support from the local authority, partner agencies and individual lead practitioners. This report sets out the importance of the role of corporate parent, as well as an overview of where children in our care live, including our Mockingbird fostering scheme.

### **2. Policy**

North Somerset Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023 – 2026 sets out our commitment as corporate parents.

In February 2018, the Department for Education published Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities applying corporate parenting principles for children in their care and care leavers. As corporate parents, elected members and council officers have a statutory responsibility for the wellbeing of children in care and care experienced young people. 'A strong corporate parenting ethos means that everyone from the Chief Executive down to front line staff, as well as elected council members, are concerned about those children and care leavers as if they were their own. This is evidenced by an embedded culture where council officers do all that is reasonably possible to ensure the council is the best 'parent' it can be to the child or young person.' (Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers statutory guidance for local authorities February 2018).

Our strategy demonstrates North Somerset Council’s and its partners (including Health, Police, and voluntary organisations) commitment to ensuring that the life chances of every child and young person in our care are improved to match their peers. This requires us all to be strong advocates to ensure our children and young people’s needs are met in the best way possible. It is our responsibility to make sure that our children and young people for whom we are responsible feel safe and secure, have stability in their lives, and that they are supported to achieve their full potential and fulfil their ambitions and aspirations. When providing a service for our children and young people in care we should always challenge ourselves by asking, ‘would this be good enough for my child?’

### 3. Details

When a child becomes ‘looked after’ the council takes on a corporate parenting role, either with the agreement of the parents or through a court order which gives the local authority a share of parental responsibility.

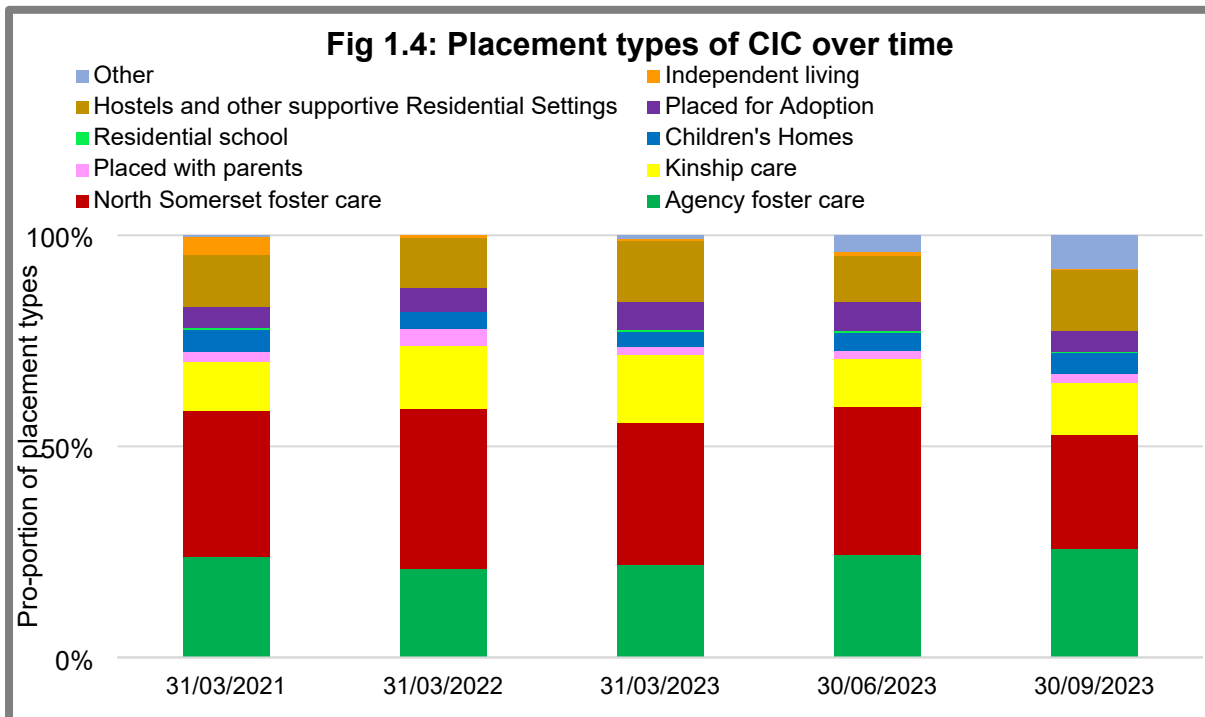
The reasons for increases and decreases in numbers of children in care are complex. The assistant director and service leaders tightly monitor all requests for a child to be in care. Every child in care is reviewed to ensure that care plans are being progressed and plans to return children home wherever possible are being actioned.

There are various arrangements for a looked after child’s living arrangements known as placements. As at the end of Q2 2023/24, 65% of North Somerset’s children in care lived in foster care. This is lower than the previous quarter and also lower than the latest figure nationally (70%). Other placement types include children’s homes (5%), supported accommodation placements (14%) and adoptive placements (5%).

At the end of September 2023, out of the 65% children in care placed in foster care, 27% were placed within North Somerset foster care, 12% within kinship care and 26% within agency foster care. The percentage of agency foster care is slightly up compared to previous quarters but it remains lower than the England average. The overall North Somerset foster care, including kinship, is 39% which is lower compared to previous quarters and 4% lower than the England average. We know that the majority of children in care need to live in a family setting and that this gives them the best outcomes. We work hard to recruit foster carers in North Somerset, to enable children to remain in their local area, where they belong and close to their family networks and school. ‘In-House’ foster care with our North Somerset foster carers means we know carers well and are able to match children effectively and also offers value for money, costing significantly less than a home with an independent fostering agency.

	Mar-2021	Mar-2022	Mar-2023	Jun-2023	Sep-2023	England 31/03/2022
Agency foster care	24%	21%	22%	24%	<b>26%</b>	27%
North Somerset foster care	35%	38%	34%	35%	<b>27%</b>	43%
Kinship care	12%	15%	16%	11%	<b>12%</b>	

At the end of Q2 2023/24, 61% of all children in care were placed inside North Somerset. These figures are better than the England average at 56% placed inside the local authority boundary. There is more detail below about the types of home our children live in.



In North Somerset we are particularly proud to be sector leaders in delivering the Mockingbird family model of foster care. Mockingbird is a pioneering programme delivered in partnership with The Fostering Network. The programme nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community of six to ten satellite families called a constellation. Of the children placed with our in-house foster carers – 46 children are placed with carers in one of our 4 Mockingbird constellations.



The Mockingbird model of fostering replicates an extended family model with hub home carers offering support and guidance to the wider constellation and with the whole group building relationships with regular activities and group events. This model builds resilience and helps provide stability to children in our care.

Recruitment and retention of foster carers is a key part of our plans to ensure we have sufficient homes for children in our care. Recruitment remains a challenge for a variety of social and economic issues. We are excited to be part of the South West Regional Recruitment Hub following a successful bid for DfE funding. The hub will coordinate recruitment activity across all local authorities in the south west with a target of increasing recruitment by 20%. Mockingbird is a vital part of our plans to support and retain foster carers and the recruitment and retention hub will also enable us to introduce constellation 5 in 2024.

#### **How to be a good corporate parent:-**

- **Understand who our children and young people are**, how many children and young people we are responsible for and where they live.
- **Come to our Corporate Parenting Panel** – a bi-monthly meeting focussing on the key issues and plans for our children and young people.
- **Consult with and listen to our children and young people** – we have an active care leavers forum and children in care council who are happy to give their views.
- **Consider our children and young people when making all key decisions.**
- **Support our foster carers** – support agreed by council such as exemption from council tax enable us to show our commitment to foster carers and help us stand out in a competitive market.
- **Continue to support our care experienced young people through the next steps fund** which provides valuable help to young people around specific needs to support education employment and training.
- **Include our children, young people and foster carers in events** – this is an opportunity to show how much we value our children young people and carers and offer unique experiences.

#### **4. Consultation**

This report is for information and consultation has not been necessary.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

This report is for information.

#### **Costs**

N/A.

#### **Funding**

N/A.

#### **6. Legal Powers and Implications**

N/A.

#### **7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

N/A.

## **8. Risk Management**

N/A.

## **9. Equality Implications**

N/A.

## **10. Corporate Implications**

N/A.

## **11. Options Considered**

N/A.

### **Author:**

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### **Appendices:**

Corporate Parenting Strategy

Corporate Parenting Induction for new Elected Members

North Somerset Councils Promise

### **Background Papers:**



Corporate Parenting  
Strategy.pdf



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our-promise.pdf