

North Somerset Council

Report to Council

Date of Meeting: 20/02/24

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 which focuses on listening to and responding to the voice and experiences of our children in care and care experienced young people.

Recommendations

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

To consider how the voices and experiences of children in care and care leavers are considered when making all key decisions.

1. Summary of Report

This report provides an overview of the mechanisms for hearing the voices of children in care and care experienced young people and provides an overview of the findings of a survey of children in care and provides details of how the council has responded when children in care and care leavers have raised issues with us directly through our engagement channels.

2. Policy

North Somerset Corporate Parenting Strategy (2023-2026) sets out our commitment as corporate parents. The Children and Family Social Work Act (2017) sets out a range of corporate parenting principles that all local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relations to children in care and care experienced young people and in February 2018, the Department for Education published statutory guidance for local authorities in applying these principles. As corporate parents, elected members and council officers have a statutory responsibility for the wellbeing of children in care and care experienced young people. This report will focus on the following two corporate parenting principles:

1. To encourage children in care and care experienced young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
2. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of children in care and care experienced young people

3. Details

3.1 How we listen to children in care and care experienced young people

North Somerset Council has in place a range of mechanisms in place to do this which are facilitated by the participation team in children's services. These include:

- **Forums and groups:** In North Somerset there is a children in care council and a care leaver forum. Both of these meet regularly and elected members are invited to make contact with the Participation Team to arrange to attend over the course of the year. The participation team are currently focusing on increased attendance at children in care councils by sending personalised postcard invites to children in our care and using social media and to promote our councils and forums.
- **Young Director:** Our young director is a paid position in the council and works to ensure that the voices of children in care and care experienced young people are heard and acted on
- **Surveys:** we seek views of children in care and care experienced young people through regular surveys and were one of the first local authorities to participate in the national survey – Your Life, Your Care, which asks children in care about things that are important to them and enables us to benchmark the experiences of our children with others nationally
- **Technology:** We use the Mind of My Own (MOMO) app which enables children to provide direct feedback.
- **Participation** in decisions about their lives: Children and young people are encouraged and supported to take part in meetings and reviews and where necessary supported by advocates to have their voice heard where necessary.
- **Corporate Parenting Panel:** The corporate parenting panel regularly meets with and responds to the views, wishes and feelings of our children in care and care experienced young people.

3.2 Survey Findings

Children in care aged 4 to 17 years old were invited to participate in the 'Your Life, Your Care Survey'. Forty-five per cent (79) of our eligible children in care responded. They told us what was working well and identified areas where they would like us to do better.

Things that are working well included:

- All our youngest children felt safe and settled where they live
- All our youngest children trusted the adults they live with and thought their carers noticed how they were feeling
- Almost all (96%) of our older children and young people felt their carers take an interest in their education (this was higher than the general population)
- All our younger children liked their bedrooms
- More of our older children were likely to live in a household with a pet than children in care in other areas
- The majority of children (95%) felt that their lives were getting better. This was much higher than children in care in other local areas
- All of our older children have a trusted adult in their lives
- More of our older children in care (85%) talked regularly with their carers about things that mattered to them than in other areas (66%)
- All our older children in care had spent time outdoor in nature at least once a week

Things that children in care identified that need to be better included:

- Social worker continuity: more of our older children in care (40%) said they had 3 or more social workers in the last year than in other local areas (29%) and the proportion of children that said they knew their social worker has reduced since previous surveys
- Understanding why they are in care: a smaller proportion of our younger children understood why they were in care compared to other local areas and this had reduced since the last time we undertook the survey
- Having a good friend: more children in care in North Somerset (9%) said they did not have one really good friend than nationally (3%)
- Some children feel like they don't have the right amount of contact with their mum and this has declined from previous surveys

3.3 Issues raised directly through engagement forums

The table below provides an overview of issues that have been raised directly by children in care and care experienced young people and provides an overview of the actions that have been taken as a result. This is presented in the form of 'You Said, We Did'.

You said	We did
The language we use in the documents about you can be hard to understand and you don't always like the words we use to talk about you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trained our workforce and partners on a different way of recording using a national approach called 'language that cares' – developed by children in care and care experienced young people • Quality assured our letter templates to make sure the language is better • Updated our practice model and a check through audits that we are using language that cares
You want more information and a way of connecting online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established a care leaver Instagram page to link with a Facebook page • Introduced Mind of My Own (MOMO) app and trained our workers on how to use it • More young people are now using the app to provide feedback
Be more involved in who gets to work in North Somerset providing services to you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up and run a popular young people's interview panel to recruit new staff
Want people to listen to what is important to us	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a young person's planning committee to include them in planning events and activities • They have influenced planning for – awards ceremonies; fun days; holiday activities • Invited young people to meet directly with the Corporate Parenting Panel 3 times a year. Last year they discussed housing and emotional wellbeing and mental health • Worked with you to update our feedback forms
Want to be more involved in the development of our plans and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups of children and young people have been involved in the review and development of policies and strategies, including the Education Strategy, Corporate

	<p>Parenting Strategy, local offer, mental health strategy and Higher education policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visited primary and secondary schools regularly to meet with children in care to share what is happening and how they can get involved
Want to be more involved in the fostering panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported a care experienced young person to attend foster panel – they have now joined the panel permanently so are part of the process of recruitment and reviews of foster carers
You want more information and help as you are reaching 18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have asked our workers to make sure that children and young people are informed of what to expect as they turn 18 including their rights and entitlements • We are working on 'transition packs' for young people which include independent living skills information

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

N/A

10. Corporate Implications

N/A

11. Options Considered

N/A

Author:

Liz Brierley – Interim Head of Corporate Parenting

Appendices:

N/A

Background Papers: