

# North Somerset Council

## Report to the Council

**Date of Meeting: 16/04/24**

**Subject of Report: Corporate Parenting**

**Town or Parish: None**

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

**Key Decision: No**

**Reason:** This is an update and overview regarding Corporate Parenting which focuses on education, training and employment of 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 the role councillors, in their role as corporate parents, can play in supporting the education, training and employment of children in care and care experienced young people.

### **Summary of Report**

This report provides information about the statutory duties regarding children in care as well as insights into their experiences of education, training, and employment, including the extent to which they engage in any of these. It sets out some of the challenges that children in care face with learning and achieving and ways in which the Council is currently supporting them to overcome the barriers they face. It includes data on educational outcomes in the last academic year and how this compares to children across the Southwest region. Finally, it sets out opportunities for the Council in its role as Corporate Parent of our children in care to contribute to more successful outcomes for them.

## **1. Legislative and Policy Framework**

North Somerset Corporate Parenting Strategy (2023-2026) sets out our commitment as corporate parents. In addition, we are guided by the following legislative and policy frameworks:

- Children Act (1989/2004) Children and Families Act (2014)
- The education of looked after children and previously looked after children (Statutory Guidance 2018)

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023)
- Children and Social Work Act (2017)

This report will focus on Area 3 of our Corporate Parenting Strategy: ‘Working to help our children in care and care experienced young people achieve the best they can in all educational opportunities’. We are committed to championing a culture of high aspirations for all our children in care and care experienced young people, raising educational attainment and removing barriers to learning. This area of our strategy sets out how we deliver on the following 2 corporate parenting principles:

- To ensure children and young people are safe, and to have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

## **2. Details**

### **2.1 Background / context**

When a child comes into care, their local authority becomes their ‘Corporate Parent’ and assumes all the responsibilities for their education that their birth parents do. We have specific duties towards the education of children in care, both at officer level and as Corporate Parent. The Corporate Parent role is not allocated to a single individual within the local authority; it is the authority itself that has the parenting role, and responsibilities are shared between Members and Chief Officers.

The Children and Families Act 2014 requires all local authorities in England to appoint at least one person for the purpose of discharging the local authority’s duty to promote the educational achievement of its children in care, wherever they live or are educated. That person is called the Virtual School Head - the ‘Virtual’ nature of the school references the virtual nature of the school roll as each child on the roll of the virtual school is also on the roll of the education setting where they receive their education. The Virtual School ensures that every child in care receives the right support from their own school, monitors progress and intervenes when things don’t go as planned.

The Virtual School head and other officers in the council; including social workers, independent reviewing officers, school admission officers, and Special Educational Needs and Disability officers work together to ensure that except in an emergency, appropriate education provision for a child is arranged at the same time as a care placement is made.

All children in care are entitled to and should have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which is part of their care plan. This plan is personalised to them and sets out the approach that needs to be taken to meet the child’s identified education needs, raise aspirations and build life chances. These plans enable us to monitor progress and to ensure that everyone involved in that child’s education is delivering what they need to.

Children in care have the same rights to education as all other children so and as corporate parents is our responsibility to make sure that they receive that entitlement which includes:

- Funded childcare from the age of 2 years
- A suitable full-time education in primary (4-11) and secondary education (11-16)
- Post – 16: a minimum of 540 hours per year (around 18 hours per week) of education, employment or training

Children in care have the right to have additional support through the development of a pathway plan – and access to a Personal Advisor who can help and support them into adulthood. The Personal Advisor is employed by the council and supports them through into adulthood.

## **2.2 The challenges for children in care in engaging and achieving in education.**

There is a body of evidence that shows that children in care fare significantly less well in education than their peers and this is why their education has become a matter of statutory responsibility and their experiences monitored by Ofsted. Their childhood experiences that may include neglect or abuse and the associated trauma of that can have an enduring and direct impact on their wellbeing and ability to learn. Some children in care can find it challenging to be in a school environment, however for many others it is a safe space and a constant when other things around them are changing. Children in care can and do thrive in education when there are high levels of understanding, support and acceptance. They also benefit from having an adult who is interested in their education. Over 96% of our children in care in North Somerset have told us that their carer takes an interest in their education.

Children in care and care experienced young people can experience some challenges that can be barriers to them achieving as well as their peers in education. Some of these can include:

- Feeling different from their peers
- Feeling distressed and missing their families and/or friends
- They may have had more difficulty attending school and sometimes have more appointments that their friends which can be in school time which can also mean they miss some classes.
- The impact of their childhood experiences can lead to poorer emotional wellbeing or mental health and higher levels of anxiety and worry or lower levels of confidence or self-esteem.
- Hidden special educational needs and disabilities.
- Gaps in previous learning which require additional support to catch up.
- Difficulties in building new trusting relationships with adults or friends
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children may need to learn new language, cultures and differences.
- The adults around them may not understand their previous experiences and their responses so they can be more likely to be suspended or excluded from schools and miss education than their peers.

- If they have experienced changes in carer then they might have to move schools – this disrupts not only their education but their friendship groups which can make education more difficult.
- Care experienced young people can face financial barriers to participation in education, employment and training

### **2.3 How are North Somerset children in care experiencing education in North Somerset?**

The following section provides a summary position for attendance, progress and attainment of children in care in North Somerset.

#### **Attendance (September 2023 – February 2024)**

Attendance of children in care is a high priority for the Virtual School, Social Workers and the Inclusion Service. Focused work to improve attendance recently has resulted an improvement in attendance levels when measured against pre-pandemic levels in 2019. In 2019/20 attendance for children in care was 85.1% and is currently at 89.1%. As children get older, their attendance can deteriorate, and this is the same for North Somerset children where we are particularly concerned about attendance for those in Year 11. This is monitored on a weekly basis to ensure every effort is being made to get children in care into education. Where children cannot access education, a programme of alternative education is provided for them including tutoring on core subjects such as reading, writing and mathematics. All Year 11 children in care are currently accessing education and will sit formal examinations this year.

#### **Educational Outcomes (2022/23)**

##### **Primary school:**

- At the end of primary school (Key stage 2), children take Standardised Ability Tests (SATs) and are judged as to whether they meet expected standards in reading, writing, maths.
- Of the nine children in care who took SATs in 2023, 22% met the expected standard. This compared to 34% of children in care nationally and 33% in the southwest and 59% of all children who took the tests.
- As a result of this gap, all Year 6 children in care have been offered additional tutoring and are supported by the Virtual School Inclusion Officer.

##### **Secondary school:**

- At the end of secondary school (Key stage 4) children sit GCSEs. GCSEs are graded 9 – 1 (high to low). A Grade 4 correlates roughly with an old Grade C. Most children sit eight GCSEs which generates an attainment score (the average of the eight grades) and a progress score (how their GCSEs compare with other children).
- Of the 11 children who sat GCSEs in 2023, the average attainment score was 19.7 compared to a national and regional of 24. In both English and Maths these children did less well. As a result of this, all Year 11 children (18 in 2024) are being offered tutoring through the PEP.

- Where children are unable to sit GCSEs, often as a result of disrupted attendance patterns and the impacts of trauma on their learning, or a Special Educational Need which make the conventional academic pathways unsuitable, vocational alternatives are being delivered to ensure that all children in care finish their secondary education with qualifications.
- The prediction is for the gap to close this summer (2024) for secondary children in care.

### **Post 16 participation in education:**

- Participation rates on education, employment or training are high with 97% of the 72 children in care aged 16 or 17 participating. For those that are not participating, sometimes called 'NEETs' – our Post 16 team, which includes highly experienced EET (Education, Employment, Training) Coaches provide a bespoke 1:1 service. This includes Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) about all post-16 pathways and careers, practical help, and support to apply for college, jobs, apprenticeships. The team provides an in-person service which also includes signposting to other specialist services where appropriate, for example housing, substance advisory services, youth offending services. The team regularly meets with housing officers in the council to ensure that all young people who are in care have access to information advice and guidance about post-16 Pathways. They also regularly meet with social workers and youth offending service.

## **2.4 How are care experienced young people from North Somerset achieving in Employment, Employment and Training?**

We monitor the participation of care experienced young people in education, employment and training aged 19 to 21 years and report on this quarterly. At the end of quarter 3 2023/24 there were 119 care experienced young people aged 19 to 21 years. Of these 54% were in education, employment or training – an increase from the same time last year and just below the England average. The table below shows the type of education, employment and training care experienced young people are participating in.

<b>Activity status</b>	<b>Number of Care Leavers</b>
<b>Young person engaged full time in higher education (i.e. studies beyond A level)</b>	4
<b>Young person engaged full time in education other than higher education</b>	12
<b>Young person engaged full time in an apprenticeship</b>	5
<b>Young person engaged full time in training or employment (not apprenticeship)</b>	20
<b>Young person engaged part time in education other than higher education</b>	13
<b>Young person engaged part time in training or employment (not apprenticeship)</b>	10
	<b>64</b>

## **2.5 Support for care experienced young people.**

Every local authority is required to have a local offer for care experienced young people aged 16 and above. In North Somerset our offer to support care experienced young people in education, employment and training includes:

- Weekly drop-in on a Wednesday for support and advice on education, employment, and training options
- Next Steps Panel - this offers funding for specialist training or equipment to help care leavers access employment.
- An Education, Employment and Training panel, with links to colleges, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities to help young people towards their career aspirations.
- A specialist job coach who can support with careers advice and help supporting young people into education, employment, and training.
- Apprenticeships
- Financial support packages for various aspects of Further Education and Higher Education.
- A celebration of individual achievements in a personal way, for example by taking young people out for a meal to celebrate completing significant qualifications.

## **2.6 Improvement in support for the education, employment and training of children in care and care experienced young people.**

The education of children in care was a focus in the most recent inspection of children's social care by Ofsted in 2023. Although much good feedback was shared, inspectors and the Local Authority officers agreed that this was a priority area to work on. Since the inspection, considerable investment has been made in the Virtual School including new leadership and additional staff to provide the capacity that it required to support children, young people, foster carers, social workers and schools.

High quality Personal Education Plans (Peps) are key to keeping a child front and centre, listening to their wishes and feelings, and ensuring that the right education provision is in place to promote positive outcomes. Due to the barriers in learning that Children in Care face, the Virtual School supports Designated Teachers in schools to prioritise both pastoral care and academic achievement. Although the PEP takes place three times a year, the Virtual School may be more involved with the school or setting to offer ongoing support.

Training has been provided to schools and foster carers to help them to strengthen their respective contributions to children's education. The Council is also rolling out trauma informed practice training across all state funded schools in North Somerset as well as early years settings to embed a culture of understanding and an ability to better respond to children's needs. Every PEP Meeting is now attended by a member of the Virtual School.

## **2.7 How can Corporate Parents actively support Children in Care?**

Support for children in care does not need to stop with statutory duties and neither is support limited to Children's Services and its Lead Member. As Corporate Parents, there

are many opportunities to support children in care and care experienced young people with their educational progress. This might can include:

- Keeping the importance of the education of our care experienced children and young people high on the agenda, regularly scrutinising our work in this area and monitoring improvement programmes
- Offering practical support with core skills in reading, spelling, maths and science
- Providing moral support and building esteem by regularly celebrating success
- Using their voices to promote learning and engagement opportunities within the community.
- Continuing to listen regularly and directly to our children and young people.

Support for our children and young people will need to be provided in a structured way to provide the value, fairness and consistency required to meet the needs of a group with a wide age range of diverse interests, aspirations and talents. Members who want to offer support can contact: Jacqui Scott ([jacqui.scott@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:jacqui.scott@n-somerset.gov.uk)) Head of the Virtual School or Liz Brierley ([liz.brierley@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:liz.brierley@n-somerset.gov.uk)) Head of Corporate Parenting.

### **3. Consultation**

N/A

### **4. Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications associated with this report – it is useful to note that the Virtual School receives grant funding through a number of separate grants. This year, grants have been used to employ an Inclusion Officer who can offer practical support and guidance in schools.

### **5. Legal Powers and Implications**

N/A

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

N/A

### **7. Risk Management**

N/A

### **8. Equality Implications**

N/A

### **9. Corporate Implications**

N/A

## **10. Options Considered**

N/A

### **Author:**

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### **Appendices:**

**N/A**

### **Background Papers:**

N/A