



Northumberland County Council

County Council

Wednesday, 17 January 2024

Corporate Parenting

Report of Councillor(s) Leader of the Council Glen Sanderson: Chair of Safeguarding Corporate Parenting Group,

Responsible Officer(s): Audrey Kingham, Executive Director for Children, Young People & Education

1. **Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the Tackling Inequalities priority of the NCC Corporate Plan 2023-26 in particular that children and young people have the best start in life and grow up well and that we deliver our statutory functions including being an effective Corporate Parent.

2. **Purpose of report**

This report is to update and engage members on progress with implementing the Council's statutory responsibilities for corporate parenting of our cared for and care experienced children and young people.

3. **Recommendations**

1. Members note the progress made in the last 12 months.
2. Members to consider how they can contribute to the whole council approach to corporate parenting.

Key Issues

1. Our ambition of embedding a whole council approach to corporate parenting is evolving. Progress during the last 12 months has been good but there is further work to be done, and we are seeking to build on these achievements by actively involving members in what we plan to do next.
2. Notable developments in the last 12 months include:

- Reviewing the Terms of Reference and meeting structure for the Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Group that is now chaired by the Leader of the Council;
 - refreshing Northumberland's Care Leavers' Covenant that demonstrates our offer to our children and young people that is above the statutory minimum required;
 - engaging senior leaders across the council and multi-agency partners, including in the private sector;
 - participating in regional and national initiatives to broaden our Local Offer to care leavers.
3. Our aspirations as good corporate parents are set out in the recently published *Children in care and care leavers' strategy 2023-25*. Separate working groups are in place to progress actions for each priority, and monitoring takes place quarterly at MALAP (multi-agency looked after partnership) meetings, chaired by the Director of Social Care, Young People and Families.
4. While this paper outlines the progress and ambitions of what we want to develop and offer for our cared for children and care leavers, we do know that our young people think we can be good corporate parents because they tell us regularly about their experience of local authority services and in particular the support from their workers: *(Worker's name) helped support applications and areas I had struggled with* "They have helped me by helping with furniture for my flat and getting me moved in" "If I ever need any help with anything they are always there" *(Worker's name) has been amazing*".
5. External reviews of our work as corporate parents have noted good and ambitious continuous improvement of our approaches. The Ofsted ILACS inspection of 2020 stated that "Scrutiny of services and performance throughthe corporate parenting advice group (CPAG) has improved and now offers a strong forum for challenge. The CPAG actively engages with 'Voices Making Choices' (children in care council) to hear first-hand about the experiences of children who are in care, as well as those of care leavers".

A recent visit in November 2023 from the DfE National care advisor found "the leadership and management approach was ambitious, aspirational and I got a real sense of passion and commitment to have a better offer for care leavers across the whole service area."

4. **Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable**

09 November 2023

5. **Background**

- 5.1 When a child comes into care, the local authority becomes the Corporate Parent which means that every councillor and officer within the council, and partner agencies have a responsibility to provide care for those children as a parent would for their own child. (The Children and Social Work Act 2017). In Northumberland the Children in Care and Care Leavers' Strategy 2023-25 sets out our vision as

corporate parents which is to be a council where meeting the needs of children, young people and families is the focus so that they get the best out of life.

- 5.2 Governance of our corporate parenting arrangements in Northumberland is strong. Under new Terms of Reference, Northumberland's multi-agency looked after partnership (MALAP) provides leadership in relation to our vision and is responsible for developing, implementing and reviewing the corporate parenting strategy. MALAP is accountable to the Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Group (SCPG) that is now chaired by the Leader of the Council. There is external scrutiny from Ofsted in the inspection of local authority children's services (or ILACS).
- 5.3 One of our flagship corporate parenting initiatives is Northumberland's Care Leaver Covenant, a national inclusion programme that supports care leavers aged 16-25 to live independently. We have had a Northumberland offer since the initiative was introduced 5 years ago, and have taken the opportunity to refresh this as the programme has engaged new partners across the North East. We are delivering services above the statutory minimum in the 5 defined areas of independent living, employment education and training, safety and security, health and finance and these are detailed in our local offer which is on the Northumberland website. We aim to achieve this through a whole council approach of responsibility for being a corporate parent sitting across the whole council and not just within children's services.
- 5.4 For employees and members there is now corporate parenting training available on Learning Together. We are encouraging employees to access the training as we work with service directors to clarify their commitment by developing a corporate parenting Promise for directorates for our care experienced children and young people.
- 5.5 Senior officers in Childrens Services are meeting with the respective member groups to further support the development of our corporate parenting responsibilities.
- 5.6 We are becoming stronger corporate parents through partnership working in the region and nationally. The North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB) is one of 10 national pathfinders in the NHS to have signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant to design and deliver new careers for the care experienced community. Northumberland is leading the development with North Tyneside and Newcastle of the ICB Universal Family project which aims to place 250 care leavers in employment, education or training in 2024.
- 5.7 The North East Raising Aspirations Partnership (NERAP) is a higher education collaboration of 5 local universities - Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside – that is committed to offering support at each institution to care-experienced students. Northumberland has participated for 10 years in NERAP's Choices Together programme for Year 10 and 11 pupils that involves a range of activities for care-experienced young people to think about their futures and how higher education can help them reach their goals. NERAP has now signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant and is working with our Virtual School careers' advisers to engage more of our looked after children into the programme, and to provide the right level of support to retain care leavers who are already following higher education courses.

- 5.8 Northumberland is a member of the relatively new Regional Care Leavers' Board and has lead responsibility for the financial stability workstream. The aim of the Regional Board is to ensure young people leaving care receive the same local offer regardless of their home authority and there are 5 different workstreams to drive this ambition across the region. Recent achievements include access to free public transport from Nexus and access to driving lessons.
- 5.9 Work continues to engage the private sector as a corporate parenting partner. Relationships are developing with Bernicia and Morgan Sindell, with expressions of interest from other local businesses. The private sector has a valuable contribution to make regarding employment and training opportunities.
- 5.10 There is clear momentum behind our ambition as good corporate parents, but there is still work to be done. Ways in which members can contribute include:
- work with local business and services to provide opportunities for our young people,
 - challenge stigma and promote positive understanding of cared for children.
 - Be visible and support our services.
 - Support and develop our care leavers covenant.
- 5.11 Overall we would ask all members to play their part in offering the care and support to our children and young people as they would as if it were their own child.

6. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations

- Members note the progress made in the last 12 months.
- Members to consider how they can contribute to the whole council approach to corporate parenting.

7. Implications

Policy	A whole council approach to corporate parenting could be underpinned by policy to ensure our children in care and care leavers are prioritised in all service areas, for example prioritised for employment and training opportunities
Finance and value for money	Current work is being delivered within existing service budgets, and fixed term DfE grant funding (Pupil Premium Plus Post 16 Pilot)
Legal	The Corporate Parenting responsibilities of the local authority are statutorily underpinned by the Children and Social Work Act 2017
Procurement	The social values in procurement policy are key to sustained success
Human resources	Ensuring staff across the council are aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities.
Property	None have been identified

The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No - not required at this point There is consideration at a national level of making care experience/care leavers a protected characteristic, but has not progressed to date nationally
Risk assessment	None have been identified
Crime and disorder	None have been identified
Customer considerations	That we support our cared for and care experienced children and young people as we would our own children in line with our statutory responsibilities
Carbon reduction	None have been identified
Health and wellbeing	The physical, emotional and mental health and wellbeing of cared for children and care leavers is a priority
Wards	None

8. Background papers

8.1

Northumberland's Children in Care and Care Leavers' Strategy 2023-25

[Corporate-Parenting-Strategy-2023-25.pdf \(northumberland.gov.uk\)](#)

Link to Local Offer on the website:

[Northumberland County Council - Northumberland Care Leavers - Your Local Offer](#)

[Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers, statutory guidance for local authorities: DfE February 2018](#)

9. Links to other key reports already published

Not Applicable

10. Author and Contact Details

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