



North Yorkshire
County Council

**Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting
Members' Group
2021/22**

1.0 Foreword by County Councillor Caroline Goodrick, Chair of the Corporate Parenting Members' Group

- 1.1 As Chair of the Corporate Parenting Members' Group, I am pleased to introduce the group's Annual Report for 2021/22.
- 1.2 The Corporate Parenting Members' Group is a non-decision making, informal working group of Members, who come together with officers and relevant partner agencies to offer challenge and support around services for children in our care and for our care leavers. There is arguably no greater responsibility for Members than as corporate parents; to ensure that the support and care given to children and young people in the authority's care – and to those leaving our care - is as we would expect to be given to children of our own.
- 1.3 The COVID-19 pandemic has tested all of us in one way or another; both service providers and recipients. The group has continued to seek reassurance in this period that colleagues in the service have been able to maintain the high levels of support that we know everyone is passionate about providing. I can only commend the adaptability and tenacity of our young people, our front line staff and support staff in coping with these challenges.
- 1.4 The focus of the group's quarterly meetings has continued to consist of a review of progress against the key principles of the corporate parenting strategy, in addition to a rolling annual schedule of additional updates on key areas such as youth justice and advocacy. Last year, due to the pandemic, our report was published slightly later, in July 2021. As such, this report is a slightly shorter one than previously; it covers the period from June 2021 to the end of March 2022 and it provides an indication of the key discussion points and areas of interest for us moving forward into 2022/23. The group has continued to meet remotely but as we all move out of the worst phase of the pandemic, we look forward to having the opportunity for more direct contact with the young people that we are committed to supporting.
- 1.5 Finally, I would like to give thanks on behalf of the group to County Councillor Annabel Wilkinson, whose stewardship of the group as Chair over the last three years has ensured the continued progression of this important group.

2.0 Children in Care and Care Leavers' Strategy 2021/24

- 2.1 The council's corporate parenting strategy, "We Care Because You Matter" 2018/21 underwent a light-touch refresh last year, to bring it up to the point at which we move into local government reorganisation. The refreshed strategy, the Children in Care and Care Leavers' Strategy 2021/24, carries forward the corporate promises from the previous iteration and the additional input was developed with contributions from both children in care and care leavers. The refreshed strategy has also been updated with examples of activity by the North Yorkshire Care Champions during the pandemic, examples of the work of the Virtual School and how the service has been supporting unaccompanied asylum seeker children.

- 2.2 The Members' group had a session with relevant officers to consider the updates and provide comments. Members felt that the refresh read well and concurred that a more in-depth piece of work should be deferred until after local government reorganisation. The review of the strategy generated some useful discussions among the group. For example, Members have taken an interest in the leisure offer available to care leavers and foster carers, and it is hoped that local government re-organisation will provide further opportunities around this.
- 2.3 The revised strategy also makes reference to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, chaired by Josh McAlister; the outcomes of which have just been published as this annual report has been drafted. The service is in the process of reviewing the findings of the report to take into account any findings or recommendations around how we deliver support in North Yorkshire. The group will therefore be interested to look at this with officers in the coming months and to understand any potential implications.
- 2.4 Following the group's consideration of progress against the strategy's core principles across the year, the group remains satisfied that the authority is moving forward in all areas of the following corporate principles. The following provides a brief update of some of the key discussion points for the group within the reporting period, and areas of interest moving forward.

3.0 Key Principles Reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Group (June 2021 to March 2022)

3.1 The Health of Children in Care

To act in the best interest, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.

- 3.2 The group annually seeks input to its meetings from designated health professionals who work to provide services to children in care and this has continued to be a very beneficial relationship. The Members heard that during the pandemic, the focus of work for these colleagues has been around meeting the mental health needs of all children as this had seen greater acuity. Members explored how health services and the children and young people's service can work to serve the needs of these young people best. It is evident that while there are crisis pathways available through mental health services (CAMHS), waiting times can be lengthy for more urgent cases, which is a concern for Members. It was reassuring to hear about the early assessments and support mechanisms embedded within the young people's service to help mitigate issues.
- 3.3 An ongoing issue of interest to the group has been around ensuring that all children in care receive regular dental check-ups, particularly as during the most intense periods of the pandemic, only 51.7% of children had received a dental assessment (March 2021). This has been exacerbated by a national problem around access to NHS dental care but following work by the service and by health, this figure rose to 70.4% in Q3 of the 2021/22 financial year.

Challenges have also arisen in relation to ensuring consistently high numbers of children in care are up-to-date with their immunisations. The proportions fell from almost 9 out of 10 children fully immunised in 2018/19 to just under 7 out of 10 at the end of Q3 2021/22. A targeted plan has been put in place through the young people's service to identify all those children not up-to-date and to help encourage these immunisations to be done. The group will be looking to keep these figures under review through the quarterly data and analysis received at its meetings.

3.4 Youth Voice and Youth Participation

To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;

To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.

3.5 With the clear overlap between these two core principles, the Members' Group reviews progress against these at the same point in the year. Members were pleased to hear how the service had adapted to remote means of engagement work during the pandemic, but equally that the easing of Covid restrictions has seen a range of planned face-to-face engagement work again. This includes a renewal of quarterly catch-ups with between Youth Council members and lead elected members and senior leaders in the service, as well as art academy groups set up across the county. The Youth Council in Craven is very active and currently attends the quarterly meetings of the County Council's Area Constituency Committees (ACCs), to which they have some input. Members noted the aspiration for this to be rolled out further across all area ACCs.

3.6 Critically, young people in care and those who are care experienced, are actively encouraged to become involved in helping to review and make recommendations to shape key council services such as through inspections of the library service, leaving care and reviewing the EHCP process.

3.7 Members are keen that this level of vibrant engagement and consideration of youth voice and participation continues following local government reorganisation.

3.8 Ambition for Children

To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for those children and young people

3.9 The group takes this report alongside the Virtual School Head's Annual Report each year. The purpose of the Virtual School is to raise the educational achievement of children in care, promote their emotional wellbeing and improve their life chances as a more vulnerable group.

3.10 Members have been keen to understand how the Virtual School has been working with schools in the last year to ensure children in care are supported in their education during lockdown, that they are attending schooling and are supported to return to school life. The group heard how children in care continue to be supported in their aspirations and in particular how the Leaving

Care team work with employers and partners to try to match children's aspirations and secure interviews. Members have been pleased to see that even in spite of Covid-19 restrictions, there have continued to be celebrations in some form for children in care leaving school, and members of the group were invited to (remotely) join the Virtual School graduation ceremony in January 2022 for children in years 11, 12 and 13 who have completed a course.

3.11 The group were pleased to note that the Virtual School has had its highest completion rate in six years of 93.7% of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) delivered to timescale in the spring term of 2021. As schools return to having more externally validated assessment data this summer, the group will be keen to get a clearer picture of educational attainment for this vulnerable cohort of learners.

3.12 Safeguarding and Permanence

For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work

3.13 Members commended the No Wrong Door approach, which continues to provide an effective mechanism for supporting young people and families and ensuring that a number of young people do not come into care. The group also heard about the restorative practice work undertaken within family groups to prevent conflict and abuse.

3.14 60% of placements are within 20 miles of the family home, enabling links to be maintained with friends, education and the local community. Members were pleased to note that the number of moves that children make to multiple placements is low in North Yorkshire when compared with our statistical neighbours and stability is generally good.

3.15 Members have discussed the management of cases of unaccompanied asylum seeker children who have come to North Yorkshire and it is likely that this will continue to be a topical area of interest.

3.16 Transitions

To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living

3.17 Members have given consideration with officers from the service around how best to support young people moving into work; for example by ensuring that the training levy is offset to help encourage more employers to offer apprenticeships and placements. It is pleasing that there have been a number of opportunities afforded to young people such as a pilot supported by Anglo-American called 'Street Sessions', which supports the development of independent skills.

3.18 A key area of interest for the group has been the consistent availability and affordability of suitable accommodation across the county, particularly for care leavers with additional needs. It was acknowledged this is an area of challenge for the service at present as the availability and quality of stock is variable across districts. However, it is anticipated that the move to a unitary authority

will present greater opportunities to determine how accommodation for vulnerable adults is provided and the group will keep this under review once the reorganisation has bedded in.

- 3.19 Members were pleased to learn about the launch of “Always Here”; an innovation unique to North Yorkshire which affirms that the County Council, quite rightly, is here for its care leavers at any stage in their lives.

4.0 Other Issues Considered by the Group

- 4.1 The group looks to take a variety of additional topics on an annual basis, which help to give further context to the intersectional work done with other services and partners to support young people in care or who are care experienced. Below gives a flavour of the recent issues discussed.

4.2 Missing Children

Detailed data and contextual information is provided to the group on an annual basis so that it has an overview of the numbers of children who are reported as missing from home or care. Members noted that the service’s audit of these cases has identified that in many instances, children are missing because they want to spend time with friends or don’t want to return home or to the place where they live. Work is done to identify patterns of behaviour and engage further with families and carers. Partnership working arrangements with police officers appear to have been working well.

4.3 Youth Justice

The youth offending team provide an annual overview for the group on data, context and partnership activity. Members have heard about the various factors which lead to the over-representation of children in care within the criminal justice system. However, there is also excellent partnership working in place under local protocols to divert children in care away from the criminal justice system. An operational delivery group helps to troubleshoot on issues where particular young people are being flagged up by the police locally.

4.4 Advocacy

The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) provides advocacy support for children in care and those in need, including care leavers. Under a renewed contract with the County Council, the group heard that NYAS’s support offer from April 2022 will include regular visits to residential children’s homes and short breaks provision, which will be widely promoted to young people. NYAS have been supported by the County Council to recruit a new member to the Campaigns Advisory Group which comprises care experienced young adults. The group will be interested to hear further about the work of this group at the next update.

5.0 Regulation 44 visits

- 5.1 The group has continued to receive quarterly updates on independent inspections undertaken of local authority children’s homes within the county

and how the homes are performing. Members have been able to provide support and guidance on issues arising from these reports and constructive challenge where helpful.

- 5.2 Members of the group carry out Regulation 44 (Children's Homes England Regulations 2015) monitoring visits, to be satisfied that as corporate parents, the children in our care are well looked after and have their needs met. Unfortunately, with the intensified periods of restrictions during the pandemic in the last year, it has been difficult for the Members to engage in many of these visits directly. Following recent changes to the group's membership, it will be reviewing link member roles to ensure that inspections can re-commence.

6.0 Membership and governance

- 6.1 The Corporate Parenting Members' Group is not a Committee of the Executive but a non-decision making member working group responsible for supporting the Executive, and the Council as a whole, in its role as corporate parent. The group regularly updates the Lead Executive Member for Children's Services on corporate parenting issues, and at any stage, should any issues arise in the interim which they consider should be drawn to the attention of the Executive
- 6.2 The Group comprises between five and ten members, appointed annually by the Executive, and may include members and co-opted members from the Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman of the Group is appointed by the Executive. The membership of the group during this reporting period was as follows:

Cllr Steph Duckett
Cllr David Goode
Cllr Caroline Goodrick
Cllr Janet Jefferson
Cllr Cliff Lunn
Cllr Caroline Patmore
Cllr Gill Quinn (Vice Chair)
David Sharp (VCS rep on Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee)
Cllr Annabel Wilkinson (Chair)

- 6.3 The group met remotely on four occasions in the reporting period, in addition to a session to consider the refresh of the corporate parenting strategy in September 2021.

- 6.4 The group membership appointed by the Executive in June 2022 is as follows:

Cllr Alyson Baker
Cllr Steph Duckett
Cllr Caroline Goodrick (Chair)
Cllr Janet Jefferson
Cllr Cliff Lunn
Cllr Kirsty Poskitt
Cllr John Ritchie
David Sharp (VCS rep on Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Cllr Janet Sanderson, as Lead Executive Member for Children's Services, will continue to attend each meeting of the group.