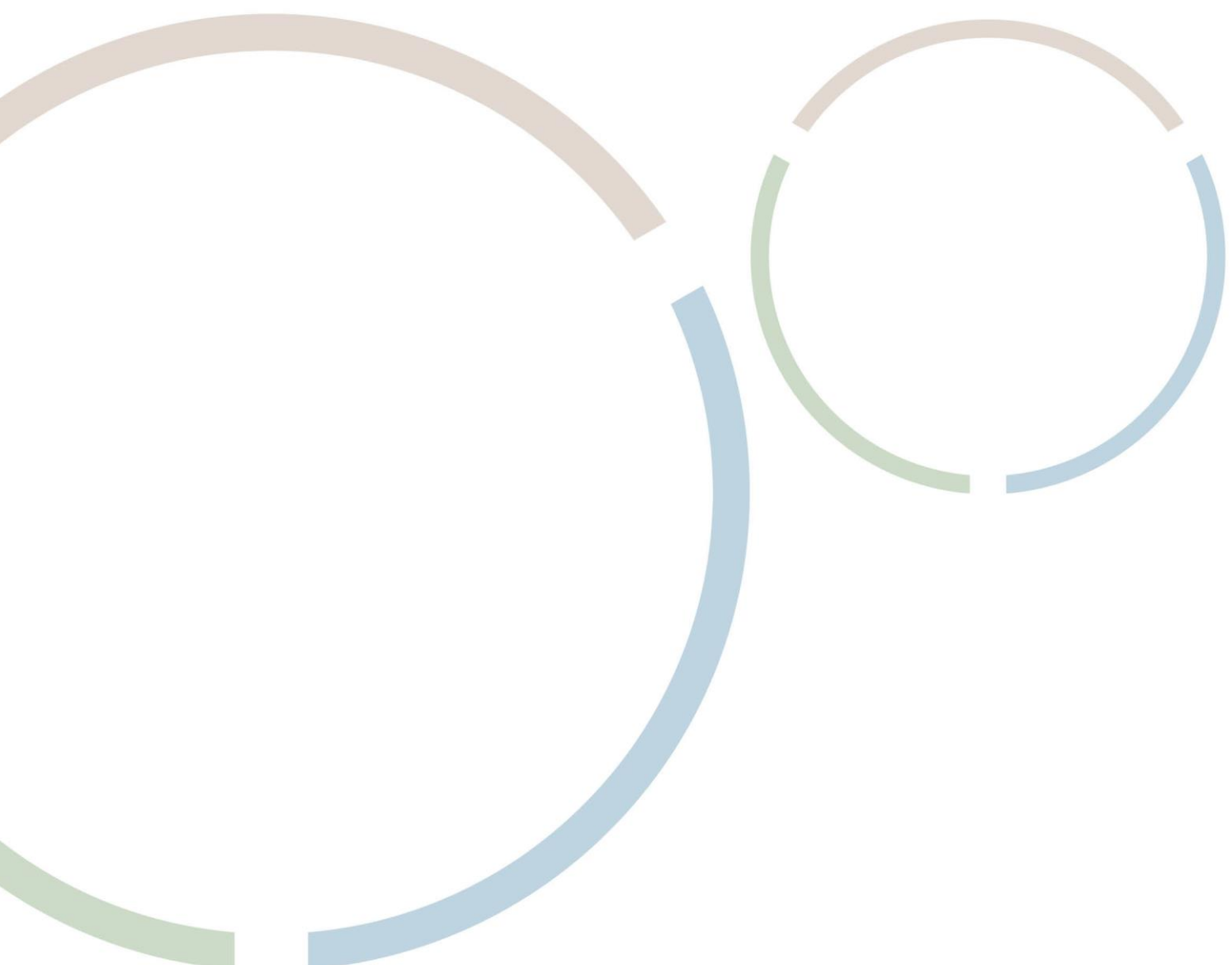


Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Members' Group 2022/23



1 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 2022/23.
- 1.2 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 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. The group also benefits from the support of the Executive Members for Children and Families and Education, Learning and Skills.
- 1.4 This report updates on the activity of the group over the last year and indicates areas of interest for us moving into 2023/24. 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 missing children. As we have moved out of the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the group has adopted a blended approach of in-person and remote meetings, and group members have enjoyed being able to start renewing visits to our residential homes and with our care-experienced young people.
- 1.5 I would like to give thanks on behalf of the group to the officers who work tirelessly with our children in care and care leavers, as well as to thank our partners in the health service who have continued to provide invaluable input to this group this year. I would also like to thank those Members who have helped to support care leaver activities through their Locality Budgets in the last year.

2 Key Principles Reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Group (April 2022 to March 2023)

- 2.1 The group remains satisfied that the authority is moving forward in all areas of the corporate parenting strategy 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.

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.

- 2.2 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. Members heard that health partners are working closely with local authority colleagues to improve the timeliness of Initial Health Assessments undertaken for young people coming into care. Timeliness has been impacted by paediatrician availability in the Scarborough area and also compounded by the recent increased pressure to conduct health assessments for those refugee arrivals identified as under 18. Health colleagues will be coming to update the group on this matter again in summer 2023.
- 2.3 Members were pleased to note that there has been a steady improvement in 2022/23 of the number of children in care accessing regular dental assessments and that health and local authority colleagues are working closely to maximise opportunities for dental access. The group has also continued to regularly discuss the issue of take-up of routine immunisations by children in care as this has declined since the pandemic, but further partnership work is underway to analyse the data and to encourage children in care to take up their routine immunisations.

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.

- 2.4 With the clear overlap between these two core principles, the Members' Group reviews progress against these at the same point in the year.
- 2.5 Face-to-face engagement with young people has gathered momentum as we have moved out of the pandemic and the views of those in care or who are care experienced have been actively sought in shaping some of the council's services. This has included undertaking an inspection of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process and feeding in views on the council's SEND strategy, as well as taking part in interview panels for senior posts in the Children and Young People's Service. The group has heard over the year about how the service has continued to try to capture the feedback of young people in care through the Mind of My Own

app; in particular commending that since the app's re-launch in 2022 there have been over 2,000 statements received regarding the welfare of children and young people. With the rapid increase in UASC in the county, the app's translation functionality makes it an important additional tool for the service to have in ensuring views are captured by those receiving a service.

Working Together

To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.

- 2.6 The service continues to offer a range of support to carers, including Emotion Coaching Training for our foster carers and building networks of family support. The group identified that local government reorganisation presents an opportunity for improving the consistency in approach to provision of leisure passes for children in care and foster carers and is keen to see how this develops.
- 2.7 Members were also keen to discuss how effective partnership arrangements are being developed to improve transitions and support for young people. The group were pleased to hear of the work undertaken with health services in particular and how this has helped to ensure in recent months that there has been an increase in the numbers of care experienced young people accessing dental assessments.
- 2.8 The group noted the work to support the various needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in the county; for example by having 'champions' to work with carers and developing engagement sessions through the youth voice team and a local football club.

Ambition for Children

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

- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 Members were pleased to hear that 29 care experienced young people were at university last summer and that educational outcomes have continued to increase at GCSE level, with 28.5% achieving five GCSEs at Grade 4 and above and 21% at Grade 5 and above. Work is ongoing by the Leaving Care team, with partner agencies, to help secure apprenticeships for young people and Members considered what more could be done to help further these opportunities. Members noted that an audit of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) had been undertaken to

ensure continued high standards and that this had identified the need to bring young people's voices more into the process for developing their plans.

- 2.11 The group were pleased to note that celebrations have continued to be arranged for those graduating from the Virtual School and for our care leavers, and Members have been keen to support and attend these wherever possible.

Safeguarding and Permanence

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

- 2.12 Members commended the work done to place children as close to the family home as possible, with over 60% placed within 20 miles and almost 83% placed within their local district. The group is particularly pleased that in the vast majority of cases, North Yorkshire children continue to be placed with North Yorkshire families or within our own residential establishments. The group noted the positive upward trend in the increasing numbers of children leaving care under Special Guardianship Orders within families and that the service has ensured that adequate resource can be drawn on to support these cases.
- 2.13 Capacity within the fostering service continues to be fairly tight and as the cost-of-living crisis deepens, the service is unfortunately anticipating greater numbers of children being placed into care. The group will therefore continue to monitor admissions to care and how the service is responding to the additional pressures, along with those pressures brought to bear by the increasing cohort of UASC. The service has continued its regular campaigns to recruit foster carers and it is hoped that local government reorganisation will bring additional opportunities to recruit more carers.

Transitions

To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living

- 2.14 The group has been particularly interested over the last year to understand the pressures on the service as a result of the increasing cohort of UASC to the county and to ensure that there is also suitable accommodation available to our care leavers. Discussions have focussed in particular on how local government reorganisation may provide opportunities to increase the types and availability of accommodation for care leavers. The group was pleased to hear of work underway to map potential stock going forward and that the service is thinking creatively around the options that can be provided, e.g. conversions of units. This is an area that the group would like to continue to monitor going forward.

- 2.15 Members have considered the service's response to the unexpectedly high volume of UASC this year, including the use of emergency accommodation and developing staff to take on what is highly specialised and legalistic work in parts. Linkages are being developed with further education colleges and community links (e.g. mosques) to provide for the broader transition into community life. The group is reassured that the service is taking all steps that it can currently to try and suitably accommodate and support UASC arrivals but will keep this under close review going forward into 2023/24.

3 Other Issues Considered by the Group

- 3.1 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.

3.2 **Missing Children**

Detailed data and contextual information are 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. At the most recent update for the group, it was discussed that while reporting looks at those young people recorded as 'missing', this can often just be young people who have stayed out longer with friends. Plans are put in place with foster families to help identify appropriate 'triggers' for notifying the police. In a number of cases, recording also reflects repeated incidents by the same young person. Effective partnership working with the police locally helps to identify any young people who may be more at risk of being missing for longer or being exploited and the service deploys disruption methods to help safeguard those young people.

3.3 **Youth Justice**

The youth offending team provide an annual overview for the group on data, context and partnership activity. Young people under 18 who are remanded in custody automatically become recorded as 'children in care' of the local authority, even if they had not been so previously. The impact of this, statistically, is that children in care appear to be generally over-represented within the criminal justice system. The group heard of the significant improvement in the last couple of years in terms of reductions in young first-time entrants to the justice system in North Yorkshire. Partnership working arrangements to ensure that case reports are provided by the service to the court around emotional and psychological factors have led to some

effective outcomes and diverted some care experienced young people from the system.

3.4 **Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2021/22**

The group annually takes an update report on the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to quality assuring and improving services for children in care, child protection conferencing and foster care reviews. The group heard about the service's focus on developing the participation of young people in order to be able to better advocate for them. Members were keen to hear how the service is ensuring that it continues to provide a quality service while managing a high caseload volume and were reassured by recent measures to recruit to and further develop its pool of IROs.

4 Performance of residential establishments and Regulation 44 visits

4.1 The group has continued to receive a quarterly overview on the performance of the county's residential establishments, which provides an opportunity to consider any issues, trends and areas of good practice. The group has commended the tireless work and support given by staff in our homes in a year where there have been many challenges to cope with, including staffing changes, pressures on capacity and caring for some young people with particularly complex needs.

4.2 Members of the group are happy to be actively engaged in carrying 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. Following the changes to the group's membership in May 2022, a development session was led by Democratic Services and the No Wrong Door Manager in September 2022 to provide new Members with information about this role and its expectations. Members have also been keen to secure enhanced DBS clearance over recent months before performing this role. As such, Members of the group have recently begun to make links with their locality home and look forward to getting know the staff and young people there over the next year.

5 Membership and governance

5.1 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. The group may refer any issues directly to the Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5.2 The membership of the group, following appointment in May 2022, was as follows:

Cllr Alyson Baker
Cllr Steph Duckett
Cllr Caroline Goodrick (Chair)
Cllr Janet Jefferson
Cllr Cliff Lunn (Vice Chair)
Cllr Heather Phillips (appointed January 2023)
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, also attends meetings of the group.

5.3 The group met on five occasions during this reporting period; remotely on three occasions and in person on two occasions.