



Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Members' Group 2023/24



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 2023/24.
- 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 2024/25. It has been another busy year, and the focus of the group's quarterly meetings has continued to be a review of progress against the key principles of the corporate parenting strategy. There has also been a rolling annual schedule of additional updates on key areas such as the Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report. A further area which the group have asked to receive quarterly updates focus on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and how this cohort links into each corporate parenting principle. We recognise that UASC are amongst the most vulnerable groups, and it is imperative that the Corporate Parenting Members' Group gain a comprehensive understanding of how they are supported by NYC.

We are now one year into the Local Government Restructure and although no longer restricted to Covid-19 virtual meetings, the group continues to adopt a blended approach of both in-person and remote meetings (remote meetings taking place during the harsher winter months when the weather can impact on ability to travel).

- 1.5 On behalf of the Corporate Parenting Members' Group, I would like to give thanks 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. We are especially proud to have been able to provide funding for quilts

through Quilts for Care Leavers, a “quilted hug” for young people leaving local authority care and some Members have even made quilts themselves. We’ve also funded hot water bottles.

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 Health professionals providing services to children in care have continued to deliver an annual update to the group, which members have found to be extremely beneficial and informative. Health colleagues spoke about the positive partnership working with children's social care and the other networks who support children in care. Members heard of the proactive steps being taken to meet the statutory requirements for Initial Health Assessments (IHAs), which is an ongoing challenge, especially as a high number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) are settling in North Yorkshire. This included accessing additional healthcare provision contracted by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to help alleviate pressures. Immunisations (particularly for UASC who arrive with very few immunisations) and dental health checks have also been a priority, and healthcare partners have committed to prioritising vulnerable children and children in care receive. The Children in Care Health Professional Network were able to provide some case studies of a young person's experience of a IHA.
- 2.3 Members were pleased to note the measures in place to tackle the increasing number of IHAs, and requests for immunisations and dental checks. They welcomed the value of partnership working in reducing waiting times. They were also pleased to hear that although statutory guidance around child death overview processes (CDOP) has not extended to age 25 (from 18) for children in care, the guidance does note that local authorities should notify the Secretary of State for Education and Ofsted of the death of a care leaver up to and including the age of 24. Local partners can also conduct a local safeguarding practice review, even if the criteria for a serious incident are not met. Corporate Parenting members welcomed the case studies and is pleased to provide a substitute member to attend the Children in Care Health Professional Network when required.

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 The Youth Voice and Creative Engagement Teams continues to help young people to find a voice and contribute to their care review as well as contributing to the shaping of council services. Since the Council's re-launch of the Mind of My Own App in 2022, we have had the quickest jump up to 2000 statements and we currently stand at over 5000. This is an amazing achievement and NYC was awarded VOXCON's 2024 "Greatest Champion" award winner. The app supports the welfare of children and young people and can translate into different languages to enable UASC to access it. Members were pleased to hear that young people have participated in interviews for senior level posts at the council and have undertaken service reviews, such as the Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) process. They have also been asked to get involved in reviews of road safety outside schools, and inspections of the No Wrong Door hubs.

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 In 2023, the service launched a large scale recruitment campaign to recruit more foster carers across the county, with a £500 "golden hello". Although it can be a slow process, members were pleased to hear that at least 5 carers have been successfully recruited. There are also Independent Visitors who volunteer to support children looked after. Corporate Parenting members volunteered to promote information about becoming short-term foster carers. Support to all foster carers continues to be provided on an individual basis, peer to peer and in group settings. Support is also offered to "children who foster" (foster carers' own birth children) and to foster carers in therapeutic interventions with trauma experienced children. Members were pleased to hear that while Independent Visitors are expected to commit for a minimum of two years, many continue to advocate for the young person for much longer than this.
- 2.7 Members discussed how large the gap is between "need" and "provision" of foster care. They heard that some young people, in particular UASC struggle to find long term placements, however, at present, the service is currently managing demand.

2.8 The group were pleased to hear that the council undertakes a rigorous scrutiny process when selecting interpreting providers.

2.9 Members were invited to the 2023 Care Leavers Celebration Event, held at the University of York.

Ambition for Children

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

2.10 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. Members were pleased to hear that the Virtual School continues to play a pivotal role in the development of the Attachment Research Community Call to Action, which has a target to make all schools attachment and trauma aware by 2025. The group heard how 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. Personal education plans are consistently strong, and the virtual school has enabled children to remain in education whilst not in a school setting. A total of 161 young people received 2415 hours of non-specialist (mainstream school) tutoring, whilst 32 young people received 765 hours of specialist (special school) tutoring.

2.11 Educational outcomes have continued to increase at GCSE level, with 24.2% achieving five GCSEs or more at Grade 4 and above (including English and Maths). Looked After pupils in North Yorkshire made amazing progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Across two of the three progress measures (Writing and Maths), Children in Care in North Yorkshire outperformed their peers nationally during 2021/22. 53% of children at Early Years Foundation Stage achieved Good Level of Development compared to 41% nationally. Furthermore, the figures for those Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) are well below the national figure.

2.12 The Leaving Care team and Opportunity Brokers continue to support young people with their aspirations, working with partner agencies to support group settings and on an individual basis, and building on the apprenticeship scheme within the Authority. Members were delighted to hear that there are young people on the Civil Service Internship for Care Leavers, and two young people have recently achieved a level 3 apprenticeship and secured permanent roles within the Early Help Service.

2.13 Members heard that the annual care leavers' conference at York University had received excellent feedback and was attended by 45 care experienced young people, NYC services and partner agencies. Young people were involved

throughout, including the planning stages, video compilation, filming the event and performing on stage.

Safeguarding and Performance

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

- 2.14 Members were encouraged to hear that over 98% of children and young people in care are living with a North Yorkshire registered foster carer, which is significantly higher than the national figure. 42% of young people in foster care are residing with family and friends, which is very close to their goal of 50%. 64% of placements are within 20 miles of the family home, which enables links with friends, education, and community to continue. For siblings unable to live together, all options are explored for siblings to stay connected, either face to face or through other means.
- 2.15 The group were informed that in-house fostering service is currently operating with the occupancy of long term foster carers at 100%, which impacts the availability for new admissions requiring a long term foster home. Consequently, this has an impact on short term stability statistics, and the NYC marketing strategy to recruit foster carers includes a drive to attract emergency weekend/respite carers. Members discussed further ways that the council can retain carers so that children and young people continue to be placed within the county.
- 2.16 Members heard that the adoption process for children in North Yorkshire is completed much faster than the regional or national level: 69% of children in North Yorkshire waited less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family, as opposed to the national figure of 56%.

Transitions

To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living

- 2.17 The group continue to be interested in how the council is supporting UASC and how the impact that this cohort has on the service. UASC account for 25% of NYC's care leavers and a new UASC team is fully operational, with officers experienced in supporting this cohort.
- 2.18 Members have continued to be interested to hear about the type and availability of accommodation for care leavers and commended the work being done by housing. They heard about the lack of availability in the more affluent parts of the county as young people are being priced out of the market. NYC offer support by providing bonds and deposits, but it is still proving challenging to find accommodation in the young person's preferred location. The housing strategy has highlighted that care

leavers need reasonably priced housing, and this may require capital investment by the council.

- 2.19 The group welcomed a demonstration of the Care Leavers App which helped them better understand the resources and support that care leavers can access. Members expressed that they would be happy to continue allocating some of the Locality Grants to support care leavers moving into their new homes.

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 **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)**

The group asked that moving forward, could each of the corporate parenting principles include a sub-section that focusses on UASC. They are grateful to now receive quarterly UASC update reports as they recognise that this is a growing cohort settling within the area and presents specific challenges. In order to better understand how services are addressing these challenges, the group have heard how additional social care professionals have been recruited who have extensive experience of working with UASC. They were also informed of steps being taken to secure appropriate supported accommodation (rather than unsuitable temporary hotel accommodation), especially for 16/17 year olds. Members were reassured to hear that services are working closely with Legal, Property and Procurement and the Neighbourhood Policing Team to make resettlement for UASC young people as smooth as possible. The Corporate Parenting Group have welcomed Councillor George Jabbour and his valued contribution and advice about engaging with the UASC community.

3.3 **Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2022/23**

The group received an annual update of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) report which informs them of how services for children in care (CIC), foster care reviews and child protecting conferencing are quality assured. This year's report highlighted the steps being taken to enable more young people to attend their conference meetings, which includes thinking more creatively and promoting the Mind of My Own App. Members were reassured to hear that there continues to be a lot of partnership working and a better joined up approach which has greatly helped the service and the IROs to complete their reviews within the expected timescale.

3.4 **National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) Annual Report 2022/23**

The group invited NYAS to talk about the support they offer to the most vulnerable young people living in North Yorkshire. NYAS is a leading children's charity, providing advocacy and legal representation to children and adults when important decisions are being made about them. Members heard how historically, the bulk of their work focussed in the Scarborough area, but mapping is now changing, and they are seeing an increase in referrals from Harrogate and surrounding areas. This reflects the high number of child protection cases and children in care. NYAS's contract with NYC extends to providing advocacy to UASC.

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 welcome the verbal updates and the Chair and Vice Chair appreciate the very detailed reports which include lots of useful evidence and highlights the positive developments across the service.
- 4.2 Members are happy to be actively engaged in carrying out Regulation 44 (Children's Homes England Regulations 2015) monitoring visits within their locality, to be satisfied that as corporate parent, the children in our care are well looked after and have their needs met. They were pleased to hear about the positive Ofsted inspections, and the much needed capital investment in the two No Wrong Door homes, which have made the environment much more welcoming.

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 2023, was as follows:

Cllr Alyson Baker (Young People's Champion)
Cllr Steph Duckett
Cllr Caroline Goodrick (Chair)
Cllr George Jabbour (appointed September 2023)
Cllr Janet Jefferson
Cllr Cliff Lunn (Vice Chair)
Cllr Heather Phillips
Cllr Kirsty Poskitt
Cllr John Ritchie
David Sharp (VCS rep on Children and Families 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 two occasions and in person on three occasions.