



CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Annual Report
2022/23**

CHAIR'S FORWARD

I am pleased to introduce the 2022/2023 Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee.

Following the easing of Covid 19 restrictions, the Committee have been able to re-engage with care experienced children and young people, this has provided members of the Committee to hear the views, challenges and achievements directly from care experienced young people in Cardiff.

A particular highlight for me has been attending the annual Bright Sparks awards, this ceremony has been running for 17 years and recognises the achievements of children looked after, families, carers, and staff.

I was privileged to be able to give out an award on the evening, and it was fantastic to see so many people face to face. It was great to see all the accomplishments of our young people and celebrate their success, resilience, and determination.

This year has also provided an opportunity to strengthen our role as a Committee by welcoming new members following local government elections. Members of the Committee have taken part in training, hearing key messages from our young people of the expectations of us as a Committee and as Corporate Parents.

Looking to the year ahead, the Committee will focus on building on engagement sessions, as well as visiting services, and organisations providing opportunity to hear from staff, families, and young people directly, on the services that support them.

Councillor Sarah Merry

Chair, Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee

DIRECTOR'S OVERVIEW

The Annual Report for 2022/2023 highlights several key pieces of work that the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee has been involved in over the past year.

The report focuses on a variety of updates that the Committee have received which includes the work undertaken to recognise and support young parents in and leaving care, a new provision in the city to support our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and the exciting plan to develop a new Virtual Headteacher role.

It is encouraging to see the engagement session being held between our young people and members of the Committee which has provided an opportunity for members to hear directly from our young people as well as the plan for further engagement through the members visits programme.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank members of the Committee for their contributions and active involvement throughout the year. I would also like to welcome new members to the Committee and thank all for their encouragement and passion to engage with our children and young people.

Deborah Driffield
Director, Children's Services

Introduction

It is the collective responsibility of members, partners, and the council to ensure that children who are looked after are provided the best possible care and safeguarding. Every member and employee have the statutory responsibility to act for those children in the same way that a good parent would act for their own child.

Cardiff Council's Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee are collectively responsible for achieving this and ensuring children and young people receive the best possible care and support, that they are appropriately safeguarded and achieve the best possible chances in life. The Committee actively works to promote the life chances of looked after children in the care of Cardiff Council and those young people who are care leavers. The voice of those children and young people in care help to drive and shape the Committee agenda and priorities, this also includes monitoring services that are delivered across all statutory and voluntary sector organisations.

This report presents the Committee's main activities during 2022/23. It begins with background information that is helpful in understanding the Committee's function, purpose, and the scale of its responsibilities. This includes:

- A record of meetings and attendance
- Committee Training
- Young People Engagement
- Activity of the Committee
- Monitoring Performance

What does it mean to be a Corporate Parent?

“When a child or young person enters the care of the Council, the role of being a parent is taken on by the local authority. This is known as Corporate Parenting. The term describes how Cardiff Council collectively fulfil their parenting responsibilities,

by seeking positive outcomes for children looked after and young adults who are care leavers in the same way we do for our own children. From early years into adulthood all our children, young people and young adults should be kept safe, are happy and have every opportunity to thrive. Leadership & influence Effective Corporate Parenting requires not only strong collective ownership and leadership but influence at the most senior level” (**Cardiff Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024**) [Children's care services \(cardiff.gov.uk\)](https://www.cardiff.gov.uk/childrens-care-services)

Who are the Committee?

The Cardiff Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee brings together strategic partners to work with elected Councillors to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people and care leavers. The Committee’s values highlight the right results can only be achieved by all professionals working together and listening to children and young people to understand what matters to them.

Record of meetings and attendance

During the 2022/23 municipal year, 2 Committee meetings were held. Two scheduled meetings in July 2022 and October 2022 were adapted to a training session to support new members in their role, and as an engagement session with members of the Committee and children and young people

The scheduled meetings were held on:

- 15th March 2022
- 28th June 2022 (Training session)
- 18th October 2022 (Children and Young People Engagement session)
- 9th January 2023

Membership

Membership of the Committee is approved by Council at its Annual Meeting each year. Seats are allocated on a politically proportionate basis. The Committee is chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council.

Meetings were also attended by a core group of senior managers from Children's Services, Education, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and NYAS Cymru. They attended in the capacity of advisors to respond to questions. Invited guest speakers also presented to the Committee. Further information is provided on those discussions in the following section of this report.

Corporate Parenting Training

In June, the Corporate Parenting Officer and Operational Manager for Safeguarding & Reviewing Hub facilitated a series of training sessions, helping new members gain an understanding of the Committee's purpose and the expectation of the role as a member of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee and Corporate Parent.

The session also provided an opportunity to discuss the previous arrangements for the Committee and what new members would like to see from future meetings.

The following topics were covered as part of the session:

- Definition of Corporate Parenting
- Legislation
- Cardiff Context
- Messages from young people
- Roles and responsibilities of members of the Committee

Members of the Committee were informed of the definition of Corporate Parenting with an overview of some of the reasons why young people might go into care, as well as how young people are supported in a range of different care settings. Committee Members were informed how Committee meetings adapted to restrictions of the Covid 19 pandemic and how future meetings would be held using a Hybrid approach.

During the sessions, data was provided in relation to the number of care experienced young people in Cardiff and out of county within the context of national trends.

The Committee were informed of how Children and Young people can influence service development plans and the importance of hearing from care experienced young people. The sessions also included key messages from Children and young people explaining what they would like to see from their Elected Members and professionals.

Discussions were held about best way to provide data and information to the Committee with examples shown of performance monitoring and demographic data that has been provided at previous Committee meetings.

Individual training sessions were also held with members who were unable to attend the group training session with the Operational Manager and Corporate Parenting Officer providing the same content.

Members noted the importance of hearing directly from Children and Young people, feedback from members of the Committee included building on previous engagement sessions that had taken place and the need for young people's experiences to be reported via performance monitoring case studies.

The Committee noted that they would like to hear directly from Children and Young people about their experiences and views to help shape and influence the work programme for the Committee for the upcoming year.

Children, young people and Elected Members Engagement session

The Terms of Reference for the Committee sets out that:

“to achieve the best outcomes for children looked after and care leavers the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee will: Identify key priorities by: engaging with relevant children looked after forums, as determined by the young people, to drive the committee’s priorities”

Following feedback from members of the Committee at the Corporate Parenting training session, and in line with the Committees Terms of Reference the scheduled Committee meeting in October 2022 was adapted as an engagement session with some members of the Committee and care experienced young people who are part of the Bright Sparks group.

The Bright Sparks group is a peer support forum for care experienced children and young people, with the principal objective of ensuring that Children and Young People are afforded a voice and are active participants in shaping policy and service provision within the council and within a wider external context. The group are supported by a participation officer from the National Youth Advocacy service (NYAS).

The session provided an opportunity for members of Committee to hear the views and direct experiences of care experienced young people. It also provided an opportunity for the young people of the group to find out more about the role of the Committee members.

During the session members of the Committee were shown a video that was developed by Children and Young people, the video was a young person friendly version of Cardiff’s Corporate Parenting Strategy and included key messages which showed what support children and young people would like to see from professionals and organisations and Elected Members. The full video can be found here: [Cardiff Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024 / Strategaeth Rhianta Corfforaethol 2021-2024 - YouTube](#)

To help build confidence, some of the young people were supported by staff to facilitate a series of ice breaker activities, also providing an opportunity to build rapport with members of the Committee.

An open discussion then took place to provide an opportunity for the young people of the Bright Sparks group to share their direct experiences with members of the Committee.

The discussions were based around the following themes:

- Mental Health & Well-being support Services
- Accommodation
- Profit from Care

Several questions were asked by the young people to Committee members in relation to the themes, for those young people who were unable to attend the session the participation worker from NYAS relayed messages and questions on their behalf.

Towards the end of the session a discussion was held on the achievements of young people, focusing on individual experiences of what Children and young people were proud of.

Attendees at the session were informed that the themes and issues discussed would be presented to the next Committee meeting with a set of key actions and next steps attached to each of the themes discussed. The themes discussed would also form the Work programme of the Committee for the year.

Bright Sparks Awards

The Bright Sparks Awards ceremony is an annual event that has been running for the past 17 years. Children and Young people involved in the Bright Sparks group plan

and organise the event each year, they host, perform, and announce winners on the evening.

The ceremony provides an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments and successes of looked after children, carers, parents, care leavers and staff.

In December 2022 the first face-to-face Bright Sparks Awards Ceremony event in over two years, took place. The event was held at city hall and had over 200 individuals in attendance, this included children and young people, as well as their carers and families.

Some members of the Committee attended the ceremony to present several awards to young people and families, showing recognition of achievements, these included recognising the determination and perseverance of young people in Educational Settings.

The evening showcased a variety of performances from children and young people which included piano performances, singing, and the reading of a poem. Videos were also shown of young people's work and visit to a local farm. The ceremony also provided an opportunity for members of the Committee who attended to talk and meet young people, families, and staff.

Committee updates

During 2022/2023 Committee members received a wide range of updates and information from a variety of organisations and teams, helping the Committee gain an understanding of the issues impacting Care experienced young people and the organisations, projects and initiatives that support them.

Updates were provided from a range external and internal staff from directorates including the third sector, children services and education directorate.

The updates allow members to ask questions, have open discussions and find out how they can support as their role as Committee members and Corporate Parents.

March 2022

National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) update

In March 2022 the Committee welcomed the NYAS Advocacy Officer and the Service Manager / Committee Advisor to the meeting to provide members with an update on the work undertaken by the National Youth Advocacy Service between the 1 April and 31 December 2021.

The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) is a national charity providing information, advice, advocacy, and legal representation to some of the most vulnerable children, young people, and adults across the UK. NYAS Cymru is a registered provider of advocacy services and is commissioned by Cardiff and the Vale to provide a regional advocacy service to children and young people in receipt of support from Children's Services.

The Committee were provided with details of how referrals were made to the advocacy service, and how the service supports to enable and empower children and young people to have a voice and to effectively participate within decision making processes. Information was given on the active offer of advocacy and issues-based advocacy service.

Members of the Committee were also informed how the advocacy service adapted to Covid 19 restrictions to ensure that advocacy was still made available to children and young people during the pandemic and the examples of some the issues raised by young people who received support. The Committee were also informed of how the service was promoted and awareness raised amongst different teams in Cardiff.

Column Road Assessment Centre

Members of the Committee were provided with an update on a new refurbished accommodation for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. The Principal Social Worker attended the meeting and provided information of the planned date of opening and the type of support that would be provided.

Members were informed that the accommodation would be for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children aged 16 and over who have arrived via the Home Office mandatory transfer scheme.

The accommodation would be provided for an initial period to enable a wellbeing and age assessment to be undertaken, which will enable a more longer-term appropriate placement to be found in line with their identified support needs.

Members were provided with information in relation to the range of needs which will be met by the centre, including health, educational, linguistic, and cultural needs. The centre would also provide a place to develop independent living skills and focus on activities and community integration.

The members visit programme has been developed to include a visit to meet the team who support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to find out more about the accommodation and other support provisions in place.

Voices from Care Cymru update

The Operational Director for Voices from Care Cymru attended the meeting to provide an update and overview of the work of the organisation and the work planned with Cardiff as a Local Authority.

The Committee were informed of Voices from Care Cymru's work, which includes working with Local Authorities to develop Corporate Parenting pledges and supporting

care experienced young people to attend and present to their corporate parenting panels. Alongside young people Voices from Care deliver training to corporate parents and facilitate participation and social action groups. Voices from care Cymru also deliver a range of engagement activities and events to facilitate a care community for care experienced children and young people on a national basis.

Members were advised that a national Corporate Parenting charter was being developed and how a series of national conversation events to further develop the charter would take place. The Committee were informed of the Welsh Government Basic Income Pilot for care leavers and the work of Voices from Care Cymru over a 6-month period. This included working with young people to drive forward the need to remove the stigma related to the care experienced community, meeting with ministers to discuss the changes needed, launching the care community “kindred knot” pin badge and launching a time capsule to measure and make accountable Welsh Government in the progress of their promises.

The Committee were informed of Voices from Care Cymru’s national wellbeing and mental health service and the number of care experienced young people who have been supported through the programme. This engagement has resulted 352 structured support sessions and 116 group wellbeing sessions. Themes of these sessions include isolation, healthy relationships, emotional wellbeing, self-care, and bereavement.

A discussion was held regarding funding with particular focus on the national wellbeing and mental health project. Members were informed that the funding for the project would end in 2024 with a hope it could be maintained bearing in mind the numbers of young people who have linked with that project.

Look to year ahead – Corporate Parenting Strategy Update

The Corporate Parenting Strategy is a three-year multi agency plan that sets out what we all need to do as corporate parents to support our Looked After Children and Care Leavers to enable them to thrive and improve outcomes. The Corporate Parenting

strategy outlines five key priorities based on the views and experiences of Looked After Children in Cardiff.

The five priorities identified by our young people were:

- **Priority 1:** Improving emotional well-being and physical health
- **Priority 2:** Better connections, improved relationships
- **Priority 3:** A comfortable safe stable home whilst in care and after
- **Priority 4:** Educational achievement, employment and training
- **Priority 5:** Celebrating our children and young people

Members of the Committee were reminded of the development of the strategy which included the engagement and feedback obtained from over 250 care experienced children and young people, 70 professionals and members of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee.

The Committee were also informed of a Corporate Parenting Operational group that had been established to extend Corporate Parenting responsibilities and to monitor progress of the strategy. Members of the Committee were informed of the membership to the group and the shared action plan that was used to galvanise staff to provide updates on projects that could support care experienced young people.

Members of the Committee were updated of what progress had been made since the launch of the strategy in line with each of the priorities with a description of several projects that would take place for the year ahead.

Updates to the Committee included working in partnership with the Child Friendly City team to hold a specific event for Care experienced young people, a pilot with Cardiff University to support access to university and a campaign to support young people with emergency placement moves.

Draft Annual Report- November 2020 to January 2022

Members had been provided with a copy of the draft report which outlined the Committees activities from November 2020 to January 2022.

Due to a change in operating model to focus on the challenges raised by the global pandemic 2 Committee meetings were cancelled in the municipal period in 2020. The further 2 Committee meetings that took place in November 2020 and March 2021 were included in the report.

Updates that were provided in the Annual Report included updates around key systems that were put in place to support Committee members in their role including a refreshed Terms of Reference, Corporate Parenting protocol and the development of a Key Performance Indicator Dashboard.

The Annual Report also included the wide range of project and service updates the Committee received which included an engagement session with Children and young people. Due to local government elections the Annual Report for the Committee November 2020 and January 2022 went to Cabinet and Council in September 2022.

The Committee noted the report and delegated authority to the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Chair, to finalise the Annual Report, having regard to comments provided by Members of the Committee and Members of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee; and for The Chair to present the Annual Report to full Council.

January 2023 updates

Children, Young people, and Elected Members Engagement session update

In January the Corporate Parenting Officer presented an overview to the Committee of the engagement session that took place with Children and Young People and some members of the Committee in October 2022.

Members of the Committee were provided with a description of how the session looked, which involved children and young people of the Bright Sparks group taking a lead in facilitating the beginning part of the session with support from staff.

The Corporate Parenting Officer provided a presentation with an overview of key themes that came out of the session with a description of the next steps that would be taken by the service area and partners to implement changes.

The following themes were raised at the engagement session by Children and young people and were presented to the Committee:

1. Improvement to emotional health and well being services
2. Accommodation
3. Profit from Care

Members of the Committee were provided with a summary of the issues that were discussed at the session which included direct quotes from Children and Young people of how they would like services to be developed in the future. This included a change in the social provisions across the city, the need to ensure those young people at risk of homelessness have access to the right support and the commitment that profit from care should never be discussed in front of young people.

Members stated the importance of the commitment not to discuss profit from care in front of Children and young people should be monitored to ensure a difference is being made.

A discussion was held with members to find out how they found the session, and if they would like the similar sessions to continue. Members of the Committee expressed that they found the session useful and would be happy for similar sessions to be held in the future.

CASCADE- Good Practice Charter for Parents in and Leaving Care

The Engagement Manager from the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) attended the Committee to inform members of the development of a good practice Charter to support Parents in and leaving care.

Members of the Committee were informed of a five-year study that was conducted by CASCADE which included engagement with a number of parents and professionals as well as analysis of Local Authority survey data and national data sets in Wales.

Committee members were informed of the findings from the research which helped to develop the charter. These findings included:

- Widespread stigma (e.g., parents' capacity to be parents is questioned because of their past experiences)
- Discriminatory practices (e.g., routine referral for pre-birth assessment)
- Underdeveloped and inconsistent support
- Concerning rates of separation between parents and children (e.g., the survey found 1 in 4 children were separated from both birth parents)

It was noted that the research findings were not unique to Wales and similar evidence has been noted from international studies and reviews.

The Engagement Manager for CASCADE provided a presentation to the Committee of the key messages within the charter which included a commitment to support parents in or in the process of leaving care from a variety of agencies and a commitment to challenge stigma and discrimination.

Members of the Committee were informed of how a steering group in Cardiff has been established to help implement the charter, members were informed of membership to the group which includes representation from a range of teams within Children's Services and the NHS.

Committee members noted that the signing up to the charter should be meaningful and make a real difference to care experienced parents. Members of the Committee were informed that the presentation and report was an introduction to inform members of this piece of work and that updates would be provided on its implementation at future Committee meetings.

Virtual School and Virtual Headteacher Update

A consultant attended the Committee to provide members with an update on the work undertaken to develop a **Virtual School (VS)** and a **Virtual Head Teacher (VSH)** post in Cardiff. Cardiff Council was successful in applying to Welsh Government for funding for a pilot which will run from April 2023 to August 2024, before future evaluations are submitted to Welsh Government leading to establishing both the VS and VSH in Cardiff to further improve the educational outcomes of all children and young people who are looked after, and care experienced.

The Committee were informed that the core purpose of the role of the Virtual School Head Teacher was to drive up improvements in the educational progress and attainment/achievement of all children looked after by their authority, including those that have been placed in schools in other authorities. Putting the looked after children and young people at the heart of all they do. The VSH will have an important role in working in partnership with other authorities to support the educational progress of children in their schools but looked after by other authorities.

Members of the Committee were informed that the Virtual School is not a physical building where the children who are looked after attend and that the children and young people will continue to attend the schools they are registered at. Children who are looked after are being educated across many schools, the Virtual School Head Teacher would track their progress as if they were in a single school.

The Achievement Leader, Key Groups, advised the Committee that the recruitment and appointment to the role of Virtual Headteacher would be in time for the start of the pilot in April 2023.

A discussion was held regarding the importance of communication between various departments and services and engagement with external bodies and the age of young people supported through the pilot. Members were informed that the pilot would currently focus on school aged young people but that it could be extended to cover pre-school and post-16 ages in the future.

Discussions took place in regards to children who are placed out of County. Members of the Committee were informed that the Virtual Headteacher role would be for all looked after children by Cardiff, irrespective of where the placements are. In addition, there is a database with a complete list of Children Looked After, where their schools are and what the Council is doing to support them. It was noted of the additional challenges relating to children out of county. Officers advised that placing children in Cardiff was usually preferred where possible, as it offered the best chance of meeting their needs. Members were also informed of the national placement sufficiency situation, which makes matching local placement more challenging.

Members were informed that it can be difficult to secure the right Additional Learning Needs provision when the children are in different Local Authority areas. It would be desirable for there to be a national approach and it is hoped that the VSH could drive forward conversations in relation to this.

Members Visit Programme proposal

The Corporate Parenting Officer provided members of the Committee with a proposal of a members visits programme for the year ahead. Members of the Committee were informed, that the purpose of the planned visits were to help support members gain a wider understanding of the services and organisations that support care experienced young people in Cardiff.

The Committee were informed that the visits would provide an opportunity for members of the Committee to meet staff and some of the visits would also provide an opportunity to hear directly from the children and young people themselves.

The Committee were provided with a set of provisional dates and venues of the visits with a description of the services and organisations that were planned. A discussion was held regarding a timetable of visits to different schools to speak with a wide range and number of young people so that they can listen to their views.

The services and organisations that were included in the members visits programme included visits to a primary and secondary school, a mental health service provision and a local Childrens accommodation.

Members expressed the view that where there were restrictions on the number of members who could attend, that a reserved list should be in place and that members on the reserve list would receive at least 1 days' notice if asked to attend.

It was agreed that members receive the dates of the proposed visits in advance and it was noted the importance of feedback to the Committee following the visits.

Following agreement on the Members Visit programme in January, three members of the Committee undertook a visit to the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) team in February.

Members met the team manager, Social Workers and Social Work Assistants who work to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving in Cardiff. The visit provided an opportunity for members to find out more about the service, the range of support that is offered and the challenges that are faced when delivering the service.

Discussions were also held regarding how members of the Committee would be able to support the service.

Forward work programme

The Forward Work Programme for the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee sets out the Committee business that will be considered during the period identified in the

programme. The programme has been developed to enable the Committee to monitor the progress being made to support the children looked after by the authority.

Following a recent engagement session with children and young people looked after, several themes have been identified which are mirrored in the Forward Work Programme to effectively plan the work of the Committee for the forthcoming municipal year. This will ensure that the agenda and issues considered at the Committee will reflect the needs of our young people.

The themes to be reflected in the Committees Forward Work Programme are as follows:

- Having a safe and stable home in and after care
- Improving emotional well-being and physical health
- Education, employment, and training

Monitoring Performance

The Terms of Reference for the Committee require the Committee to regularly review performance data and ensure performance monitoring systems are in place to achieve sustained improvements. Several developments have been made to help capture data and inform the Committee of key services that help to achieve deliverable outcomes to improve the lives of care experienced young people.

For members of the Committee to gain an understanding of the services and issues impacting Children and young people a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Dashboard has been a standing agenda item on the Committee. When presented to the Committee a discussion is held on the common themes and demographic data covering several service areas including Children Services, Education, Housing and into work.

In January 2023 the Operational Manager for the Safeguarding and Reviewing Hub, introduced the report which sought approval from the Committee on the proposal for a draft Key Performance Indicator Dashboard to continue to be a standing agenda item at Committee meetings.

Members were informed that the Dashboard would bring together key data regarding Children Looked After and would encompass different areas such as Children's Services and unaccompanied asylum seeker children, number of placements moves, different placement types and the change in placement types over time, information on key achievements and educational performance of Children looked After. Input from the Education Directorate as well as the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board will continue to be included to provide a holistic overview of the Children Looked After by Cardiff.

A discussion was held on the appropriate frequency for presenting Dashboard data to the Committee, and whether Members would prefer more case studies rather than data. It was suggested that data need not be presented to every meeting and that the progress over time was the most important information. Members expressed a preference for visual presentation of data and a combination of data and case studies.

Members noted the importance of a balance between positive and negative case studies. Officers advised that case examples would be used which whilst would not be an actual young person to preserve confidentiality would provide a realistic overview of Looked After Child's experiences.

Data is now reported biannually to the Committee with a comparison being made from previous data to help identify progress, trends, and challenges.

The case studies are a standing agenda item to provide an overview to members of the Committee of the experiences of care experienced children and young people.

Conclusion

During 2022/2023 there was a focus to support new members of the Committee in their role following local government elections in May 2022.

As Covid 19 restrictions eased it also provided opportunities for members to meet children and young people face to face and take part in an annual celebration event.

Of particular interest to the Committee were:

- Corporate Parenting Training session
- Updates on accommodation for our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children
- Engagement session with Children and young people

Looking to the year ahead the focus will be building on listening events with our care experienced young people to hear their direct experiences and meeting staff and organisations through the members visits programme.

The themes and discussions from listening to our young people have been reflected in the members Forward Work Programme for the year.