



# Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

## 2021 – 2022

*"Children, Young People and Families at the heart of all we do - in every decision we make and every action we take"*

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## Foreword



Welcome to the Annual Report of the Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board, covering the financial year from April 2021 to March 2022.

We want the very best for our own children, and as corporate parents we must deliver the same level of care and support for children in care and those moving on to independence. This responsibility is expressed through the Board's Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers and reflects the seven Principles of Corporate Parenting set out in legislation.

Local elections in May 2021 brought an entirely new group of elected members to Board (aside from Cllr Baker), and an opportunity to reinvigorate its purpose and focus on the real-world outcomes and experiences of children and young people. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the former members of Board who worked so diligently to improve the outcomes for the children in and young people in our care.

The Board has made significant progress against the challenges set out by Ofsted after its monitoring visit in February 2021 and the Trust's Improvement Plan. We are particularly pleased that young people now have a greater influence in the Board's functioning, and we welcomed two care-experienced young people to the Board as permanent members in November 2021. Ofsted's monitoring visit in November 2021 recognised that "The Corporate Parenting Board has been strengthened recently and is showing some signs of impact in improving services and support for care leavers." More needs to be done, however, and the Board welcomes this challenge.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fiona Baker".

Fiona Baker, West Northamptonshire Council's Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills and Chair of the Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Edwards".

Scott Edwards, Council's Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills and Chair of the Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board.

## Executive Summary

Good corporate parenting means actively promoting the outcomes that good parents want for their children. Local Authorities' corporate parenting responsibility is set out in legislation and has been emphasised in further statutory guidance and publications. The Care Leavers Charter and the seven Principles of Corporate Parenting (set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017) express the foundations of our responsibilities. The Board's commitment is also set out in its Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers.

In April 2021, Northamptonshire County Council and the seven borough councils were replaced by West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Council. Northamptonshire Children's Trust now delivers children's social care across the county on behalf of the two councils. The Board remains a single entity covering the whole county and meets six times per year. Each council has five elected members sitting on the Board, with Cllr Fiona Baker the only remaining member from before the May 2021 local elections.

Through the year, the Board has fulfilled statutory obligations to provide oversight and scrutiny of key annual service reports, including those of the Virtual School, Independent Reviewing Officers, health and fostering and adoption services.

Board scrutinises a specific corporate parenting performance scorecard at each meeting, which has prompted challenges to the Trust and its partners in key areas, particularly health assessments for children in care.

The Board also focusses on key thematic areas (planned or ad hoc, based on prior discussions), allowing the Board to challenge and oversee services which impact on children and young people. During the reporting period, topics included accommodation and placement sufficiency, mental health, independent visiting, and support for children at risk of entering care.

Young people's influence over the Board has increased, and it continues to liaise closely with the Children in Care and Care Leavers Councils. Care-experienced young people have attended the Board to share their experiences, and presentations have featured real experience case studies, demonstrating the real-world impact of NCT's and its partners' services. Two care-experienced young people have been welcomed as permanent members of the Board. Young people's successes, large and small, are celebrated, with young people receiving certificates and shopping vouchers in recognition of their accomplishments.

Substantial progress has been achieved in meeting the challenges to the Board set out by Ofsted and the NCT's Improvement Plan, and the Board looks forward to continuing its evolution.

# 1. Governance and Statutory Context

## What is corporate parenting?

Local authorities and their partners are responsible for ensuring that care experienced children and young people are as safe and well cared for as any other child. This responsibility is called “corporate parenting” and applies equally to children who have entered the UK from overseas and are separated from their families. Corporate parenting duty rests not only with social workers and their managers, but also any other agency that provides services and support to children in care such as health services, housing departments, the police and schools. Corporate parents actively promote the same goals that any good parent wants for their child. Good parenting does not simply stop once a child turns 18, so corporate parents also have specific duties to those young people leaving care and making the journey to independence.

## Legal background

The collective responsibility for local authorities was first laid out in the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The central role of the council as an effective corporate parent has been emphasised by government in the publications *Care Matters: Time for Change* (DCSF 2007), *Care Matters: Time to Deliver* (DCSF 2008), and consolidated in aspects of the Children and Young Persons Act (2008). Other legislation and statutory guidance that determine our duties include:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 Children and Adoption Act 2006
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (as amended by the Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014
- The Children’s Homes (England) Regulations 2015
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018
- Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2000

## Principles of corporate parenting

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 provided a welcome distillation of corporate parenting responsibilities through seven principles of corporate parenting. Local authorities and their partners are required:

1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
4. 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;
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

The principles do not represent new duties as such but are designed to help local authorities and their partners fully comply with the existing duties. The Act did however introduce some new responsibilities relating to children in care and care leavers. These include a requirement to publish a 'Local Offer to Care Leavers,' setting out the services available to young people leaving care, extend the provision of personal adviser support to all care leavers up to the age of 25 and to provide education advice and guidance to young people formerly in care. The Act also introduces a number of requirements to ensure that court processes are focussed on long term plans for and specific needs of the child.

## The Care Leavers Charter

The Care Leavers' Charter is a set of promises to care leavers, published by the Government in 2012. It is "Designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good corporate parents." The Charter will "Remain constant through any changes in legislation, regulation and guidance."

We promise:

- To respect and honour your identity

- To listen to you
- To believe in you
- To inform you
- To be a lifelong champion
- To support you
- To find you a home

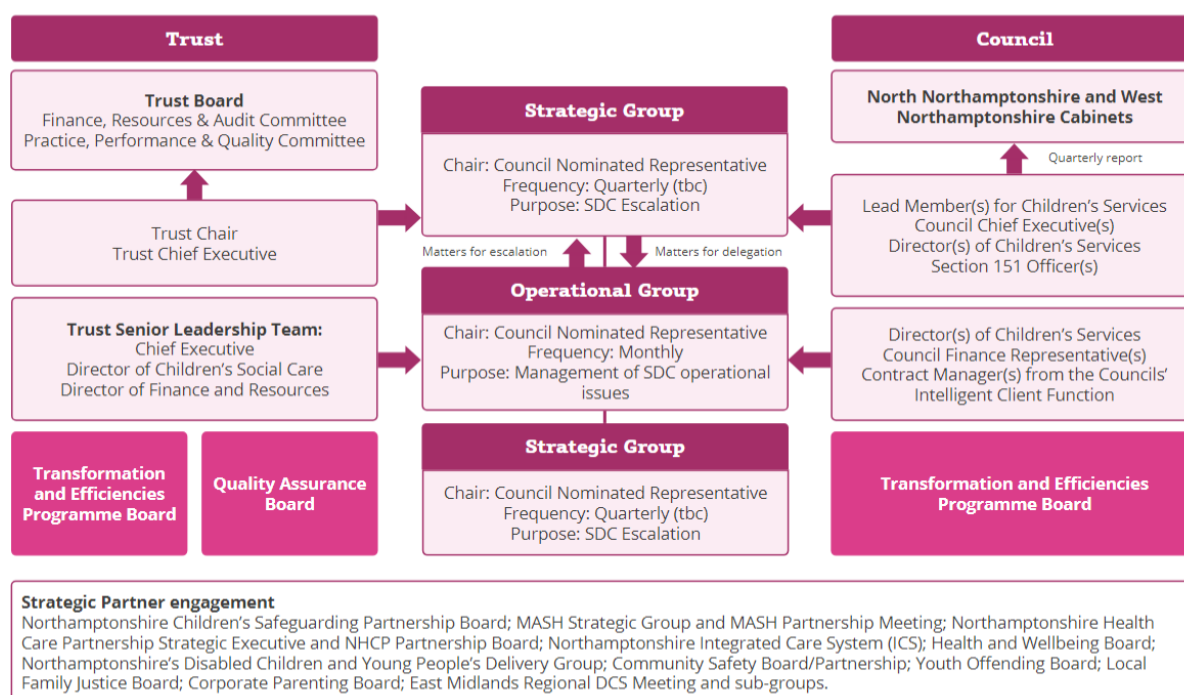
NCT has developed a separate set of promises to care leavers which have been adopted by the Board.

### [NCT and the move to unitary authorities](#)

Government legislation passed in February 2020, determined that from April 2021 Northamptonshire County Council and the seven district and borough councils would be formally replaced by two new councils, North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council. The priority during this enormous undertaking was to ensure that vital services were safe and legal from day one. Some services which were delivered by different councils were brought together through the process (aggregated), whereas others which were delivered by the county council were split (disaggregated).

Northamptonshire Children's Trust was established on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2020 to deliver children's social care across the county. It is owned by West and North Northamptonshire councils but in order to achieve operational independence it has its own board of directors which sets strategic aims for the Trust, oversees its management and holds the executive team to account.

## Northamptonshire Children's Trust governance arrangements



Decision was taken at the inception of NCT for there to be a single Corporate Parenting Board inclusive of both North and West Northamptonshire Councils. The Lead Members for each Council share the chairing of the Board with each chairing for a 6-month period.

## The Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers

The Board's pledge to young people in care and care leavers was drawn up in conjunction with the Children in Care Council and is available to view on the Young Northants and the Trust's websites.

### We will help you be physically and emotionally healthy

We will have achieved this when:

- You have the right support for your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and you do not have to wait too long for it.
- The adults close to you understand your needs.
- You have a good understanding of your health needs and history, when you are in care and when you leave care.

### We will make sure you are living in the right place

We will have achieved this when:



- You are living with people who understand you, care for you well and build a positive relationship with you.
- You have a safe and stable home life.
- Where you are living does not affect how well you are looked after.

### **We will make sure you have great relationships in your life**

We will have achieved this when:

- You have regular contact with those who are important to you, as long as it's safe.
- You understand why you are in care and are involved with the plans that affect your life.
- We are warm and courteous towards you, do what we say we will, and respect your culture and identity.
- You have enough quality time with the adults (social worker, personal adviser, teacher, doctor, nurse) who are there to support you, at a time that is convenient to you.
- Changes of social worker or personal adviser are avoided wherever possible. Any changes are explained to you, and you are introduced to the new person properly.

### **We will make sure you get a good education**

We will have achieved this when:

- You are achieving the best you can.
- You have a stable school where you feel safe.
- You feel part of your school community and are able to take part in clubs and activities.
- You have adults who understand your needs and put the right things in place to support them.

### **We will help you prepare for the future**

We will have achieved this when:

- As you become independent, you have a suitable place to live which feels like a proper home.
- You are in education, employment or training, helping you reach your potential.
- You are helped to manage your money effectively and get the right benefits.
- You have access to leisure services and can get around easily.

### **We will involve you in developing our services and holding us to account**

We will have achieved this when:

- We celebrate your successes.
- We actively seek and take account of your views, wishes and feelings to improve our services to you.

- You can access useful and accurate information about services available and the people who can support you.
- You feel able to share complaints compliments and comments about our services.
- There is a range of opportunities for you to get involved to with helping to improve all services to children and young people.

## 2. Board Activity, 2021-22

### Membership and meeting arrangements

A single Corporate Parenting Board operates in the county, with representation from both councils. It meets every two months. During the reporting period, meetings exclusively took place via video link, although at the time of writing the Board is returning to in-person meetings.

The Board did not meet in May 2021 due to local elections taking place in Northamptonshire. After the elections, all councillors for both councils were provided with information setting out their role as corporate parents, the function of the board, and the Trust's vision and objectives.

Membership was made up of councillors new to the Board, aside from chairperson Cllr Fiona Baker, and the new group met for the first time in July 2021. Given the cross-council nature of the board, Cllr Scott Edwards and Cllr Baker agreed to share chairing duties.

Training and information sessions for elected members took place in July and December 2021, led by the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting. These set out the corporate parenting function and gave a comprehensive overview of children's services from a child's perspective.

From May 2021 to March 2022, the elected membership of Board was as follows.

#### **West Northamptonshire members:**

Fiona Baker (Chair, Con), Louisa Fowler (Con), James Hill (Con), Stephen Hibbert (Con) Harry Barrett (Lab).

#### **North Northamptonshire members:**

Scott Edwards (Chair, Con), Lora Lawman (Con), Macauley Nichol (Con), Cedwien Brown (Con), Zoe McGhee (Lab).

Board is also attended by Trust officers and other representatives:

- Chief Executive Officer and Director of Children's Social Care for Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT).

- Assistant Director and Strategic Manager for Corporate Parenting, NCT.
- Head of Adoption, Fostering and Children's Homes, NCT.
- Strategic Manager, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service, NCT.
- Head of The Virtual School.
- Care-experienced young people.
- Vice Chair, Northamptonshire Foster Carers Association.
- Assistant Director, Housing and Communities
- Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, Northamptonshire Health Foundation Trust.
- Corporate Parenting Project Officer (providing administration and other support), NCT.

Other NCT officers and representatives of partner agencies also attend as required, on invitation.

### Service annual reports

While Board is not a statutory body per se, legislation requires an appropriate oversight body to have sight of certain statutory annual reports. Northamptonshire's Board fulfils this function, providing scrutiny and oversight to NCT services. Where possible, reports for Board are summarised for presentation during the meeting, while full reports are also shared a week prior.

The following annual reports were scrutinised by Board during 2021-22. Note, however, that the annual reports themselves were for the year 2020-21.

**Fostering Service Annual Report 2020-21:** During the reporting period, the number of NCT fostering households rose from 219 to 228, with the number of connected persons households (where a child is cared for by someone with a pre-existing link to them) rising from 104 to 144.

Targeted recruitment and retention activity continued, via digital marketing platforms and events such as drop-in sessions, open evenings and National Carers Week. Retention surgeries focussed on early intervention to address any placement issues at the earliest stage.

Priorities for the service included reviewing the training offer, and the recruitment of further Resilience Carers, who are trained to care for children with particularly complex needs. The Board was assured that fostering awards events were being reinstated, having been curtailed by the pandemic. Members were encouraged to promote fostering recruitment efforts via their social media platforms.

**Adoption Service Annual Report 2020-21:** The service became operational as a Voluntary Adoption Agency in November 2020. Northamptonshire has always had above average performance in timely placement of children following Placement Orders but this year, there was a 14.5% growth in our

performance against the national average. 29 children were agreed to have a plan for adoption, a 51% decrease from the previous year, largely due to court delays. There was, however, a 32% increase in adoption orders, with 74 being made, which is exceptional performance.

The service saw an increase in people making initial enquiries but not proceeding to apply to become adopters. Analysis suggested this was due in part to fears around further lockdowns and turbulent financial circumstances for the country. Support for adopters was delivered through over 30 training courses, including those focussed on attachment, virtual catch-up sessions, an expert duty service, newsletters, support groups and more.

Priorities for the service included joining a Regional Adoption Agency (which has now taken place), further embedding Dyadic Developmental Practice knowledge within the teams, and increasing recruitment activity.

Board queried what action was being taken to address court delays regarding adoption and were assured that the service was working closely with the court to address timeliness.

**Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2020-21:** The Board approved its annual report for the year 2020-21.

**Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report 202-21.** Board heard that IROs had an average caseload of 70, the top end of the national recommendation of 50 to 70. The switch to virtual meetings during lockdown brought advantages as well as drawbacks, so the service now uses a hybrid model, whereby children themselves drive whether their reviews take place virtually or face to face. A strong drive took place for IRO communications to be more child-focussed; IROs provided one-page profiles of themselves to children and addressed them directly through reports and letters. Children's participation in reviews increased from 88% to 92%.

The service continued to work closely with regional workshops and national bodies to share good practice, and with CAFCASS. 148 formal escalations were raised by the service with social care teams, in order to address drift in care planning and delays in resource allocation, which contributed to more effective plans of support and interventions for the children we are corporate parents for.

**Looked After Children Health Annual Report 202-21.** There were significant challenges meeting statutory timeframes for initial and review health assessments for children in care, for reasons including paediatrician sickness, large sibling groups being placed out of county and lockdown. Meeting the health of children placed out of county has proved an ongoing challenge. However, new administrative systems are alerting health colleagues to such placements at an earlier stage. Focus was also placed on improving the efficacy of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires, profiling the

health needs of children in care (asthma and allergies being the most common issues), and working closely with sexual exploitation specialists to ensure this issue informs health actions plans where necessary. As of 31 March 2021, the Looked After Children Mental Health team were working with 286 children; 81 of these children were receiving direct therapeutic individually or attachment-based family work.

Board provided robust challenge to the health annual report, particularly regarding health assessment performance, which had been poor in Northamptonshire for some time. It was agreed a further report on this would be presented to Board to ensure impact of the agreed actions. The report also provided the opportunity for fostering teams to be made more aware of available health pathways.

**Virtual School (VS) Annual Report 2020-21 Academic Year.** After a comprehensive review, the VS remained a single service covering the whole county, although it is able to analyse and report data, split by local authority.

The VS has continued to provide training to education and social care professionals and carers, including courses around the impact of attachment issues on learning. Participation activities for children and young people also took place during school holidays, such as sport, music and drama programmes.

89% of the Virtual School's cohort of children and young people were enrolled in education settings with an Ofsted rating of Good or Outstanding. Completion levels for Personal Education Plans for school-age children remains very high, rising from 90% the previous year to 97%. The VS scrutinises the quality of education plans as well as their timeliness, and around two thirds of plans were rated Good.

Measures of academic outcomes and school attendance were both disrupted by the pandemic. Fixed term exclusions rose a little from 84 to 92, and there were no permanent exclusions within the cohort. The VS also supports pre-school and post-16 children, each cohort having a specific education plan format. Officers work closely with early years settings, and lead a Not in Education, Employment or Training prevention group for post-16s.

## Performance scorecard

The Board reviews a performance scorecard at each meeting, providing an opportunity for dialogue, scrutiny and challenge between officers, partner agencies and elected members. Measures include

national metrics required by the DfE and relate closely to the Trust's Improvement plan. They are grouped under the following headings:

- General measures (such as population data, timeliness of statutory visits, admission and discharges from care, health assessment performance).
- Placements (proportion of children living out of county, placement stability measures).
- Adoption (timeliness of placements, number of orders granted).
- Care Leavers (young people living in suitable accommodation, employment and training measures, up to date pathway plans).
- Education (education plan timeliness and quality, exclusions).

During the year, discussions around the scorecard focussed heavily on health assessment performance, with a specific agenda item on this topic coming to Board in January. The following are examples of how the scorecard has been used throughout the year as a starting point for scrutiny of the Trust's and its partners' performance:

- Board challenged officers regarding adoption timeliness figures. In response, it was noted that there are well-understood narratives to explain outlying figures; in some cases, while the figures suggest delay, the children themselves had very positive outcomes. Ultimately, reaching the best outcome is preferable to meeting quantitative targets.
- The Foster Carers Association representative challenged NCT regarding dental check figures, highlighting that while carers do prioritise these, this is not reported accurately due to NCT data issues. Actions have been taken to improve this and a further report on progress is expected to the Board.
- Board challenged the Virtual School regarding the number of children missing education. This was usually due to delays between children being placed at a distance from their original home and being enrolled in a new school. In many cases, such children are receiving education via tuition or other means. The Virtual School has a dedicated officer overseeing the cohort of children who are not in education and were in the process of creating a new escalation strategy for these children.

### Board thematic reports

At every meeting, the Board focusses on a particular topic of relevance to care-experienced children and young people, informed by the NCT's priorities and Improvement Plan. Young people, NCT officers and partner agencies are often invited to contribute. Items may also be added to future

agendas as a result of discussions held in Board. The following provides a summary of the topics discussed at Board during the year:

**Children and young people's mental health:** This was led by a Clinical Psychologist from the Looked After Children's Mental Health Team and a Named Nurse for Safeguarding and Looked After Children. They set out the impact of early life trauma and the mitigating effects of protective factors such as consistent, trusted adults. Children seeking asylum from overseas are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues, including the effects of profound trauma.

Local mental health provision includes the specialist mental health team, wellbeing cafes, and the Ask Normen website for signposting to services. Weekly, multi-agency ATLAS meetings scrutinise all emotional wellbeing and mental health referrals. Elected members were challenged to consider their role in improving children's emotional wellbeing and mental health. For example, members should adopt an attachment-aware approach to interacting with children and young people, and consider multi-agency, community-based approaches to help asylum-seeking children.

**National Independent Visitors (IV) Campaign.** A care-experienced young person and her Independent Visitor spoke to Board about their experiences. The IV role is required by statute and matches young people with an adult volunteer to provide friendship and mentoring. The function is extremely rewarding for young people, providing stability and a non-judgmental role model and friend. The Our Legal Right campaign sought to raise awareness of and recruitment to the role nationally, and the details were shared with members. Board acknowledged the value of Independent Visitors and challenged NCT to expand the service.

**Where do our children live? (Sufficiency, housing, fostering and adoption).** As well as the annual reports of the fostering and adoption services (see above) colleagues from the Trust's Commissioning and Strategy teams presented an item around accommodation sufficiency. A care-experienced young person attended the session and challenged the Board to focus on specific measures, rather than the generic term "outcomes."

Despite lockdown and increases in the number of children in care, placement stability measures remained above national averages; of children who had been in care 2.5 years or more, 68.5% were in the same placement for 2 or more years or placed for adoption. This compared to the England average of 68% and statistical neighbour average of 67%. Northamptonshire also had a higher proportion than the England average of young people aged 16 to 21 who were living in suitable accommodation.

Significant challenges to sufficiency included finding emergency or short-notice provision and finding the right accommodation for children with complex needs. The team was meeting these challenges

through a variety of measures and impact of these was monitored by the sufficiency steering group; actions taken include accessing public health funds for individual therapeutic interventions to support placements, opening new in-house residential provision and recruiting specialist carers for children with complex needs.

NCT also outlined plans for a new, aspirational joint-working protocol with housing services, geared to improving access to independent accommodation and preventing homelessness. A new accommodation and transitions panel was also being developed, which would develop robust multi-agency plans for individual young people, particularly those with specific vulnerabilities.

**Education, Employment and Training opportunities for young people (Virtual School Post-16 provision, NEET prevention, Care-Experienced apprentice champions).** The Virtual School set out to support young people post-16, such as specific education plans, addressing barriers to accessing education, employment and training, and working closely with colleges and other organisations. The proportion of young people in education, employment or training had steadily improved year on year.

Prospects, part of the Shaw Trust national charity, set out their work with young people who are at risk of becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The service works closely with the Trust and Virtual school through a monthly focus group and their advisers work with young people on an individual basis. A Board councillor agreed to liaise with the service to explore possible venues for an extra drop-in venue in the county.

NCT's care-experienced Apprentice Champions spoke to Board about their experiences, as they took up their specialist roles focussed on housing and mental health. While they felt well supported, they challenged the Board to provide more employment and training opportunities to care-experienced young people, and to improve the recruitment process. They spoke movingly of children's social care as a "family business," and that young people themselves should be welcomed into this business.

**Introduction to Mind of My Own.** The Board was introduced to Mind of My Own, a suite of tools, including a mobile phone app, to help children share their views in a way that suits them, with an adult of their choice. It was initially rolled out in the children in care service but would extend to the rest of NCT. The Board will receive regular updates about how the app is being used and what young people are saying.

**Health Assessment Performance.** Health colleagues presented an in-depth analysis of challenges and remedial actions regarding Northamptonshire's health assessment performance. Extra funding had been secured to address a backlog of review assessments through the use of additional staff, with only limited success. NHS England were in the process of holding a national audit of health



assessments which included Northamptonshire, practice and processes were being refined to reduce delay. Undertaking timely assessment for children living out of county remained a challenge and NCT Chief Executive assured that cases could be referred to himself if required. It was noted that while the delivery model for review assessments should be analysed and adapted, the current model did provide valuable continuity for children, as they often had the same practitioner conducting their assessment year on year.

**Wider support for children and families (Engaging with families, Pause Project, Family Solutions).**

Colleagues from commissioning and safeguarding services explained the commissioned Family Group Conference process, which was instigated to help avoid the need for family court proceedings. The purpose of family group conferences (and the similar, in-house family network meetings) is to bring together members of the child's wider family to determine what support can be drawn from the network. This can mean tasks such as shopping or school transport, or a family member caring for the child if the parents cannot. In 70% of families which took part, the child remained living in the family network, compared to 50% for families who declined the process. Board queried how fathers are included in the process; officers responded that great efforts are made to include fathers, however, confidentiality issues can pose challenges to this.

A representative of the Pause Programme explained how the organisation supports mothers who have had multiple children taken into care. Practitioners with small caseloads work intensively with women on areas such as grief and trauma, domestic violence, sexual health and substance misuse, to prevent the cycle being perpetuated. Board agreed to share with their councils the value of the project, with a view to its continuation, and officers also agreed to share useful legal contacts with the programme.

Officers from NCT's Children and Families Support Services shared details of the Family Solutions programme, which has a remit to support children and young people at risk of coming into care. The service supports children aged 0 to 17 and can offer families a same-day response, with priority given to those at risk of homelessness or coming into care. Referrals usually come via legal gateway meetings but also from front-door duty and assessment teams. Joint visits take place with the child's primary worker. The officers shared a case study with Board, demonstrating how workers had helped a family to overcome significant issues and heal their relationships, with the young person's future prospects markedly improved.

## Young People's Participation

Officers and elected members make every effort to include young people in the Board's functioning, whether by inviting them to attend in person or provide materials such as videos or artwork.

Materials prepared for the Board are written in a young person-friendly format wherever possible.

The Board liaises closely with the participation groups, the Children in Care Council, the Care Leavers' Council, and the Shooting Stars group for young people with special educational needs or disabilities.

Through the year, young people have contributed significantly to the Board, and in November 2021, the Board recruited two care-experienced young people as full, permanent members. As detailed above, the Board heard directly from young people at various meetings, including a young person talking about her experience of the Independent Visitor programme, and our Apprentice Champions sharing details of their work. Presentations for Board also included anonymised case studies, helping Board to appreciate the real-world impact of NCT's and its partners' services.

At the time of writing, the Board has been involved with the reintroduction of celebration and award events for children in care and care leavers, which were on hiatus due to the pandemic.

## Celebrating young people's successes

Like any good parent, the Corporate Parenting Board celebrates the achievements of children. Every meeting includes a slot in which anonymised stories of children and young people's successes are shared, and all receive a certificate and shopping voucher in recognition. These achievements have included high-level accomplishments such as having written work published or securing first class degrees. But the Board also celebrates those ostensibly small steps, which cumulatively, add up to significant progress. This has included achievements as simple as being able to attend school regularly or engage with their social worker.

## 3. NCT's Improvement Plan: Progress and Priorities

Section 1.1 of NCT's Improvement Plan, as informed by Ofsted guidance, sets the following objective: "Development of the Corporate Parenting Board responsibilities in order for them to champion improvements."

Within this, the following specific objectives are laid out:

- Deliver CP training for CPB Members and wider council and partner colleagues.

- Strengthen CPB, e.g. through CPB member leads for specific areas, involvement in quality assurance and engagement with children in care and care leavers.
- Increase range of apprenticeships and education, employment and Training options within councils and the Trust.
- Implement a quality assurance process for Corporate Parenting Board to enable progress to be monitored.
- Increase care-experienced young people's membership on the board.

Detailed training for Board members (most of whom were new to the Board) took place in July and December 2021. A redrafted scorecard was introduced in July, allowing Board to monitor service performance in key areas. This scrutiny has helped to achieve council tax relief for care leavers, escalation of issues pertaining to health assessments for children in care and increased apprenticeship opportunities within the NCT.

Young people's participation in and influence upon Board has increased through the year, with young people themselves talking about their experiences, and two care-experienced young people being recruited as permanent members.

Whilst lots has been achieved to increase the education, employment and training opportunities within NCT, partner agencies and businesses, further work is planned. There is regular communication and joined up working between the Leaving Care Service and lead officer for apprenticeships enabling all apprenticeship opportunities, internships and vacancies to be shared with care leavers. Care leavers benefit from the guaranteed interview scheme in place and a number of care leavers have successfully applied for roles within West Northamptonshire. Continued reflection and learning are in place between the organisations with further consideration of the support required both by care leavers who begin employment with the Council and their immediate line managers to ensure that employment is sustained.

Further work is planned and to this end, an exciting event will take place in the near future, to engage partner agencies and businesses. The Board is also keen to ensure that its members play a greater role in engaging with young people directly. At the time of writing, some members have taken the opportunity to do this at the very successful celebration and awards event in July 2022. The Board looks forward to maintaining this progress, and to achieving the aims set out in its Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers.

Significant work has taken place outside of the Board to promote corporate parenting responsibilities within the Councils. Whilst each lead member diligently promotes the needs of looked after children and care leavers at every opportunity there has been specific engagement with

the Councils' senior leadership teams and all councillors. This has included attendance by 4 senior managers from NCT at a carousel event for councillors of West Northamptonshire where Councillors were provided with opportunity to hear about the work of NCT and ask questions pertinent to their individual roles and interests.

There is also increased dialogue with the leadership teams of each Council who are keen to promote opportunities for the education, employment and training for care leavers and to consider other ways to fulfil their role as corporate parents. These discussions have led to identification of 4 key areas which the Board is asked to endorse and promote and monitor progress. These are:

1. Development of Corporate Parenting Operational Groups

Delivery of each of our four priorities as identified in the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021/25 to be achieved through a series of live action plans which are driven within specific priority theme groups led by partners/officers and supported by elected member champions from the Board. Groups may be cross council in membership or specific to each council. Officers from NCT will operate in all groups with partners engaged as appropriate. These priority themes are then reported back to the Corporate Parenting Board in turn in a yearly cycle.

Priority themes as identified within the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021/25 (see appendix 1) are:

- i. Live Safe, Be Safe
  - ii. Fulfil Potential
  - iii. Develop Resilience
  - iv. Enjoy Good Health and Wellbeing
2. Commitment to corporate parenting responsibilities to be included in every job description with NCT and North and West Northamptonshire.

This will ensure that every employee is able to recognise their role as a corporate parent and consider what this means and how they can contribute to enable us to be the best corporate parents we can be to all children and young people in our care and who have been cared for by us.

3. NCT, North and West Northamptonshire Councils to consider becoming a Fostering Friendly employer

Currently less than 50% of all foster placements are achieved with NCT approved foster carers and over the next three years we have ambitious targets to increase this significantly. This requires recruitment of more foster carers. NCT and the Councils have large workforces offering a potential source of future foster carers.

The Fostering Network's Fostering Friendly employers' scheme helps employers to support and recognise the roles of their employees who foster and involves no direct costs. Members of the scheme agree to put in place a fostering friendly HR policy for all foster carers in their employment (regardless of their fostering service). This includes offering foster carers flexible working and paid time off for training and settling a new child into their home.

Fostering Friendly employers also help promote Foster Care Fortnight, to raise the profile of fostering and encourage people to consider becoming foster carers and offer children the care they need.

#### 4. NCT and North and West Northamptonshire Councils' contributions to Local Offer for Care Experience Young Adults

This details information about the services that the Council and NCT offer that may assist care leavers in making a successful transition to independence. Positively both Councils offer Council Tax discount to care leavers, which is one area of contribution to the local offer.

Areas for consideration could be:

- Inclusion of care experience as a protected characteristic as recommended by Care Review.
- Guaranteed interview scheme for care experienced young adults
- Apprenticeships/internships/work experience for care experienced young adults
- Access to leisure facilities
- Funded travel to aid access to education/employment/training for cared for and care experienced young adults

## Appendix 1: Four Priorities

### Priority themes Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021/25



How we Achieve this in Practice	Key Success Criteria
✓ We will work with communities, businesses and partner agencies to recruit more foster placements to meet the needs of the looked after children cohort and increase placement choices.	✓ Increase sufficiency of local placements to increase choice for children in care.
✓ If a child or young person has to move from where they are living, we will involve them in the decision making as much as possible and give them an information profile of the placement they are moving to.	✓ Increase in the number of children in foster placements who turn 18 and stay put in their placement.
✓ If possible, we will keep our children who are looked after with their brothers and sisters when they come into care.	✓ Reduction in the number of children in care with 3+ placement moves.
✓ Families and friends are always considered in the planning process and our children are placed with family and friends in instances where it is safe to do so.	✓ Reduction in the number of children returning to care within one year of previous period of care.
✓ We will improve choice and quality of accommodation and support for older young people in care and care leavers.	✓ Increase in the number of children in care in long-term placements (fostering).
✓ We will offer support to care leavers moving to independence to maintain tenancies.	✓ Percentage of children in care during the year who were placed within 12m of the decision (adoption).
✓ We will continue to develop clear service pathways for children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) supported by a multi-agency process.	✓ Reduction in number of missing episodes for looked after children and increase in number of independent return home interviews.
✓ We will continue to ensure that all children and young people who go missing receive return interviews, a completed risk assessment and timely management of identified risks.	✓ Reduction in number of looked after children who are first time entrants to criminal justice system.
✓ We will further develop a multi-agency response to serious youth violence enabling early identification of young	

## Priority 2



Virtual School

SEND Strategy & Transformation Programme

Care Leavers Strategy

How we Achieve this in Practice	Key Success Criteria
✓ Educational needs or requirements of the child will be considered at the outset as part of any placement.	✓ All looked after children will have an up to date PEP supported by a daily monitoring call to each school where a child attends to ensure attendance.
✓ We will support our children looked after with education, training and employment options to help them achieve the best they can.	✓ Improvement in educational attainment of children in care.
✓ Children looked after will be supported to make good progress in education.	✓ Increase in percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training (aged 17-21).
✓ Children who are required to move schools will be allocated a new school place without delay.	✓ Reduction in number of looked after children without a school place.
✓ Our looked after children with additional needs will be supported to have appropriate provision so they can achieve their potential.	✓ Increase in number of care leavers undertaking apprenticeships within Northamptonshire Children's Trust and North and West Northamptonshire Councils.
✓ All children looked after will have a Personal Education Plan (PEP).	✓ EHCP plans for children in care reviewed on an annual basis and quality assurance demonstrates plans are of good quality.
✓ Young people leaving care will be encouraged and supported with accessing further and higher education, employment	
✓ and training opportunities, including apprenticeships.	
✓ We will increase apprenticeships and work experience and training opportunities across North and West Northamptonshire, partners and the private sector for care leavers.	

## Priority 3



Reunification Policy

Workforce Development Strategy

Joint Housing Protocol

Participation Strategy

How we Achieve this in Practice	Key Success Criteria
✓ We will help our children we look after to learn about who they are as well as the important events and people in their lives.	✓ Increase in children moving out of care and number of children returning home.
✓ We will ensure all necessary information and paperwork is obtained in a timely way such as passport, birth certificate and national insurance number.	✓ % of visits to looked after children in timescale.
✓ We will promote family time between children, young people and their families in a way that enables them to have positive relationships with the people who are important to them where it is safe to do so.	✓ Increase in % of permanent social workers in Corporate Parenting Service.
✓ We will support children looked after to reconnect with family members and other trusted adults in a safe way and learn about their family history.	✓ Increase number of children and young people engaging in Children in Care Council and participation events.
✓ We will work with children, young people and families to ensure that there is effective support in place to support and maintain a return home.	✓ Feedback from children and young people.
✓ We will continue to build positive relationships with our children and never give up on them.	
✓ We will ensure that children and young people have a variety of means to express any concerns that they may have and that these are acted on promptly.	
✓ We will aim to keep changes for our looked after children to a minimum.	
✓ We will make certain that we have a robust and active Children in Care Council who are able to influence and shape the delivery of services.	
✓ We will offer support to care leavers moving to independence to maintain tenancies.	



## Priority 4



Integrated Care System

Clinical Commissioning Group Health  
of Looked After Children Strategy

How we Achieve this in Practice	Key Success Criteria
✓ Children who are looked after receive appropriate and dedicated services within agreed timescales including access to initial and review health assessments, dental appointments and emotional health and well-being services.	✓ Children and young people identify themselves as healthy and happy.
✓ We will give access to appropriate emotional and mental health support for looked after children when they need it.	✓ % of CHILDREN IN CARE with Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) scores.
✓ Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) scores.	✓ % of care leavers provided with their health passport.
✓ We will support care leavers to achieve positive mental well-being and emotional resilience.	✓ Reduction in % of care leavers who are street homeless and engaged in offending behaviour.
✓ Looked after children who have complex health needs and disabilities will have access to integrated services.	✓ Increased placement stability performance.
✓ We will make sure our children who are looked after can access their health records and history.	✓ Number of children referred to MIAP at age of 16.
✓ We will develop support offers to foster carers including access to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).	
✓ We will help our children who are looked after to do the things that are important to them in terms of culture and religion.	
✓ Young people who require support into adulthood will enjoy a smooth transition between children's services and adult social care.	