

# Children's Services

## Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2023-24

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# Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2023-24

## Foreword

Welcome to Medway's Annual Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2023-24. This report summarises the work that has been undertaken in Medway over the last 12 months to ensure good outcomes for children in our care and care leavers, ensuring that corporate parenting is at the forefront of everyone's agenda.

As corporate parents to our children in care and care leavers, we have a special responsibility to make sure that children and young people in our care get the support that they need to live the best lives possible. As Lead Member and Chair of our Corporate Parenting Board I have been delighted and proud to take on this role since the start of our new administration in May 2023, and to work with our young people, staff, and partners to deliver on our pledge to children in our care and care leavers.

*Councillor Adam Price, Lead Member and Chair of Corporate Parenting Board*

## 1. Summary

Within this year, there has been a continued focus on Medway's corporate parenting agenda to ensure improved outcomes for our children in care and care leavers and to embed the clear governance and delivery structure.

Local elections in May resulted in a change of administration but the newly elected Labour and Co-operative group made an explicit commitment to continue to build on the work undertaken through Corporate Parenting Board. The new Lead Member for Children's Services, Councillor Adam Price, took over the role of chair of the Board in July 2023.

This work through 2023-24 has included ensuring our corporate parenting agenda has been supported across the council and partner organisations. The clear Corporate Parenting Board structure has supported the delivery and scrutiny of our work. We recognise that corporate parenting is a partnership agenda and we have worked closely with our partners and young people over the last 12 months to ensure continuous improvement in our services, strong governance and leadership underpinned by the voices and lived experiences of our children and young people, whose representatives are valued members of our Board. This progress was recognised in the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services which took place in July 2023, and which found services for children in care and for care leavers to be Good.

Numbers of children in our care in 2023-24 increased from 467 at the start of the year to 503 in August but reduced again to 475 at end March. This is still higher than at the start of the year but does include Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking children who are now allocated to Medway as part of the National Transfer Scheme which Medway joined in April 2023. There are currently 23 Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking children aged between 14 and 17 years in our care, compared with 2 at the end of January 2023. Rates of children in care per 10,000 are slightly higher than national comparative data at 75 per 10,000. Placement stability for our children in care has continued to be on a par with national and southeast region, although we have a small cohort of children with complex needs who have experienced multiple placement changes.

There has been a reduction in the percentage of children in matched long-term fostering compared with a year ago – now 48%, but this is higher than 39% in 2021/2022. This has been achieved in the context of wider market challenges regarding a shortfall in sufficient homes for children in care.

16 children were adopted during the year 2022-23, a slight reduction over 19 last year largely due to delays in final hearings through the courts.

Numbers of care leavers have decreased slightly during the year, from 184 in March 2023 to 166 at end March 2024.

## **Overview of achievements in the last 12 months**

- ✓ The continuing development and embedding of the corporate parenting governance structure, including sub-groups with a focus on homes and housing, health, education and employment, and participation.
- ✓ Meaningful engagement of and challenge from children in care and care leavers, supported by Medway Children and Young People's Council (MCYPC) in the Corporate Parenting Board
- ✓ Ongoing development of the corporate parenting dashboard to enable scrutiny of performance.
- ✓ Named elected members taking a champion's role in relation to specific areas of responsibility.
- ✓ Development of new members of the corporate parenting board, supported by LGA facilitated training.
- ✓ Support for Time to Shine Awards ceremony in December 2023 to celebrate achievements of our children in care and care leavers.
- ✓ Work with Housing colleagues to better understand and meet the needs of our care experienced young people.
- ✓ Development of a new Corporate Parenting Strategy
- ✓ Proposal in consultation with young people to agree care experience as a protected characteristic.

## **2. Corporate Parenting responsibilities**

The Corporate Parenting Board is an advisory body which provides leadership and a governance structure for corporate parenting in order to drive forward positive outcomes for children in our care and care leavers. It is chaired by the Lead Member for children's services, Councillor Adam Price.

The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) meets bi-monthly with sub-groups reporting into the Board. Membership crosses all key areas, including representative from the Council's children in care council (Medway Children and Young People's Council (MCYPC)), Council officers, elected members, strategic leads for key partner agencies, as well as representative foster carers and adopters. The sub-groups are Health of Our Children in Care, Homes and Housing, School, College and Work, Listening to You (Participation), and Corporate Parenting Delivery Group. The chairs of the sub-groups are core members of the Board.

Representatives from MCYPC share their news and issues, as well as being supported to offer challenge and contribution to the work of the group. Where children or young people cannot attend in person, their views are represented through the

Young Lives Foundation (YLF). The Lead Member for Children's Services, Director of Children and Adults, Assistant Director Children's Social Care, Head of Corporate Parenting and Virtual School Head Teacher attend MCYPC (when invited), which are led and chaired by the young person who is chair of the MCYPC.

During the year the Corporate Parenting Board has met on the following dates:

- 27.07.2023
- 26.09.2023
- 28.11.2023
- 27.03.2024

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 defined for the first time in law the responsibility of corporate parents to ensure, as far as possible, secure, nurturing and positive experiences for children in our care and care leavers. This requires the Council to have regard to a set of corporate parenting principles when exercising its functions in relation to children in our care and care leavers (formerly relevant children):

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of children and young people.
- To encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people.
- To help children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for children and young people.
- For children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living

This is known as 'corporate parenting', and it is the collective responsibility of the council to prioritise the needs of children in care and seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.

There are three defining themes for achieving better outcomes for children in care and their families through excellent corporate parenting. These are high aspirations, stronger relationships and taking time to listen to the voice of the child.

The Corporate Parenting Board is designed to provide the necessary leadership that drives an ambitious and multi-agency approach to improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers. It will oversee satisfactory completion of actions identified within the Board's strategy and will promote the pledges within the Children in Care Charter in a way that becomes meaningful to corporate parents and officers who work with children in care and care leavers. In order to undertake these functions well it must work in a way that ensures the voice of children and young people is influential in decision making.

Since the Ofsted inspection in 2019, concerted work has taken place to strengthen the corporate parenting function across the Council, supported by external consultants and the LGA. This has included work to improve the focus of the CPB, so it is better able to challenge and hold the service to account for delivering the improvements needed in meeting the needs of children in our care and care leavers.

Training provided by the LGA in January 2024 focused on what it means to be a good corporate parent and how to triangulate and ask the right questions in order to get a

true sense of what life is like for the children and young people in our care and our care leavers.

CPB sessions now focus on key practice areas which are important to children and young people, and which help members to scrutinise delivery against plans.

Champion roles have been developed for elected members covering areas such as health, accommodation, and education. This plays to members' strengths and areas of expertise, brings greater scope for effective challenge and encourages an increased focus on the issues which are critical to children and young people.

The interface between the CPB and the MCYPC continues to be strong. A representative of MCYPC attends CPB meetings and acts as a conduit for sharing the views of children and young people, supported to participate by a member of the Young Lives Foundation (YLF). Young people have developed challenge cards as a way of sharing their views and experiences of being in care and to let senior managers and corporate parents know how they would like to see them improve support and services.

The CPB scrutinises a performance dashboard of data at each meeting in addition to the performance reports from the sub-groups according to the theme of the meeting.

### **3. Progress against our strategy**

Our Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers 2020-2023 set out eight key objectives. The strategy has recently been refreshed and updated and will provide a framework for the work of the Corporate Parenting Board moving into 2024/2025, but this report has focused on the objectives in the previous strategy which are:

1. Provide timely and high-quality intervention to help children remain with or return to their families, if it is safe to do so.
2. Provide and commission the right mix of placements.
3. Promote timely permanence planning for all children to ensure they have the opportunity of a stable, permanent home and long-term relationships in a placement appropriate to their needs.
4. Ensure that children and young people in our care, achieve their full potential and can access suitable education, employment or training.
5. Improve the health and emotional well-being of children and young people in care and care leavers.
6. Aim to keep young people in care and care leavers safe through the provision of trained, supported and motivated staff who understand and are alert to the potential for exploitation and abuse of young people and who take the right action at the right time.
7. Prepare young people for a successful transition to adulthood.
8. Ensure that children in care and care leavers' views and experiences inform current and future service delivery.

This report summarises activity and progress made against these objectives.

- 1. Provide timely and high-quality intervention to help children remain with or return to their families, if it is safe to do so.**

In addition to work undertaken by the social work teams, there has been support available from families from the multi-disciplinary team who can offer additional practical intervention, targeted parenting assessment work and support for parents. Our Family Solutions service provide targeted early help and offer a range of parenting support through the locality-based hubs in the community both on an individual basis and with groups of parents/carers. The Early Help Partnership Board continues to support implementation of Threshold document which sets out when families can be referred to Family Solutions, and when it is appropriate for other professionals to provide early help support for families.

The service is actively planning to utilise the NSPCC Reunification Framework to support timely and well-planned return to families where safe to do so.

## **2. Provide and commission the right mix of placements.**

Medway, like most other authorities is seeing placement stability impacted upon by national recruitment challenges, as well as increased complexity of need across our children in care population. Placement stability plays a significant role in children and young people feeling cared for and enabling them to develop and sustain positive relationships.

As the corporate parent we will provide and commission the right care and support for children in our care (CIC) and care experienced young people that best meets their needs.

The sufficiency strategy has been refreshed, informed by the analysis of need and by what the children in our care and care experienced young people told us. It aims to enable our children and young people to be supported in places that they can call home and feel loved, cared for and supported.

This refreshed strategy covers the period January 2023 – January 2025. The strategy identifies 4 priority areas:

- Supporting families:
- A place to call home.
- Promoting stability
- Moving Forward

### **In house Fostering**

The structure of the in-house fostering service has remained the same since the last annual report.

Fostering recruitment remains the key priority across the Fostering Service for both foster carers and Supported Lodgings providers.

Recruitment over the last year has been targeted on the following groups.

- Foster carers for children over the age of 11 years.
- Foster carers for sibling groups.
- Foster carers for children with complex emotional and behavioural needs including children with disabilities; and
- Foster carers for Parent and Child placements.

Despite an improved payment structure for foster carers and a strong commitment to training and support, it remains a challenge to recruit and expand our in-house service. Recruitment and retention of foster carers is currently very challenging nationally and Medway's picture mirrors the national situation, with the national cost of living crisis eroding the improvement in fees. Recruitment of carers with the right skills and commitment to fostering remains the biggest challenge for the fostering service.

The team has a crucial role in keeping children within their extended family if it is safe to do so and meeting the overall strategy of keeping children in local permanent placements. This includes providing ongoing support, advice, guidance and training to the prospective connected carers, to ensure that they have the necessary skills to care for the child or young person.

Performance reporting enables us to evidence that the majority of children's first placement when coming into care is a foster placement and this equates to 76% of Medway's CIC cohort. There is however the continuing need to recruit more in-house carers to ensure we can offer placements with our own in-house carers and reduce the numbers of children who are placed with Independent Agencies.

### **Other placements**

Over the last year, Children's Services have continued to review and understand the needs and gaps in placement provision and to consider further developments. Developments during the year include opening an E-Bed provision in partnership with an IFA for children who need accommodating in an emergency, successful re-tendering for an enhanced floating support offer and work to re-open Eden House as a residential facility for our children in accordance with our vision to keep children close to their families and within Medway boundaries resource. Application for registration has been made to Ofsted and the resource will open as soon as this is approved.

Further developments have included working with the market to commission and establish contractual relationships with IFA's and residential providers and establish a dynamic purchasing scheme which has increased the number of suppliers we work with.

Medway's move to the RAA, as part of the Adoption Partnership Southeast (APSE) in 2020, has continued to deliver significant improvements for children. More children now benefit from permanence through adoption (18 in the last year). Strengthened panel processes means children are matched in a timelier way with prospective adopters.

### **3. Promote timely permanence planning for all children to ensure they have the opportunity of a stable, permanent home and long-term relationships in a placement appropriate to their needs.**

During 2023 work has continued in the service to improve the quality and effectiveness of permanence planning for children, with a strong focus on reducing delay and ensuring permanence is achieved for children at the earliest opportunity.

Permanence is reported to the Corporate Parenting Board and the service has reported that it continues to strengthen a range of activities, including supervision and management oversight, management and performance data, permanence tracking, quality assurance activity, performance clinics, feedback from children, their careers and our partners. This improvement was recognised in the ILACS report.

Use of Special Guardianship Orders to ensure that where possible children have the opportunity to remain within their family has remained fairly constant with 23 children leaving care to an SGO last year.

The Connected Carers Team have continued to support and train potential connected carers and Special Guardians, delivering a “Skills to Care” course to better prepare them for caring for a related child as well as other regular training and more support groups to reduce the risk of placement disruption and to give carers the confidence that they will be well supported with caring for a related child.

#### **4. Ensure that children in care achieve their full potential and can access suitable education, employment or training!**

##### **Virtual School**

The detailed education outcomes of children in care 2022-23 are outlined in the virtual school annual report which was shared with the Corporate Parenting Board in March 2024.

Children and young people who were in the care of Medway Local Authority did not perform as well as their peers during the academic year 2022-2023. The Medway Virtual School works with schools in order to identify and enable schools to implement appropriate strategies of intervention and support at a pupil level but this is not yet showing in the outcomes.

The Virtual School provides support and learning opportunities to schools within Medway and further afield, and has this year piloted a new electronic personal education plan. The ePEP for Y1-Y11 has been in use from September 2023 and the development of the EYFS (early years foundation stage) ePEP and post 16 ePEP will be a priority.

The Virtual School moved under the management of our Education and SEND service at beginning of February.

There is a higher percentage of children in care to Medway that have SEND (SEN support and EHCP) compared to national. In 2023, children in Medway’s care with SEND matched the performance of children in care at national in maths. This subject was where performance was strongest at both national and in Medway. In 2023, for children in Medway’s care with SEND, performance in reading was better than national.

The support for children and young people with special educational and/or disability is described in more detail in the Medway Local Area Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) Strategy 2022-25. The local partnership was inspected in February 2024. The outcome was “The local area partnership’s arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.” An action plan has been developed with partners and agreed by the DFE.

An internal group is addressing the action plan and linking into the broader SEND implementation plan.

MVS supports schools to adopt and implement trauma informed approaches in teaching and learning. One pupil was permanently excluded in this academic year (March 2023). The circumstances were reviewed and the significant support that



the school had put in place was recognised. This has been the only permanent exclusion for over 5 years.

There was a marked increase in the number of suspensions compared to the previous academic year:

	<b>Suspended Pupils</b>	
<b>Term</b>	<b>2021 / 2022</b>	<b>2022 / 2023</b>
<b>Autumn</b>	22	26
<b>Spring</b>	26	30
<b>Summer</b>	20	33

MVS will continue to support schools to reduce the numbers and impact of suspensions.

### **Aspirations Officer**

The Corporate Parenting Board supported the appointment of an Aspirations Officer who has been based within the 16+ service. This post supports young people aged 16-25, to gain education opportunities and to help them find employment or training, with a particular focus on enabling young people to access opportunities generated by the Medway Skills & Employment Grants Scheme. The work includes working with personal advisors as the allocated worker to support young people with accessing employment, training or education (ETE) opportunities, preparing good quality CV's and applications, preparing for interviews, and to advise on any work/education related issues that may arise. The post has been vacant from December 2023 but has recently been recruited to.

The 16+ Service work closely with Medway Virtual School (MVS) and the links with other agencies has enabled greater resources and support for care experienced young people in Medway to engage in ETE programmes.

The percentage of care leavers in education, training or employment has been inconsistent over the year but ended in a similar position (56% in March 2023 to 55% in March 2024). This continues to be a priority for the service.

There are a number of areas where improvement is still needed. Young people who are care experienced and parenting, pregnant or in custody remain high profile and further work and support is needed in this area. The establishment of the Hub at the Elaine Centre continues to provide opportunities for young people to drop in for advice and support.

## **5. Improve the health and emotional well-being of children in care and young people and care leavers.**

Promoting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of children in care continues to be a priority for Corporate Parenting Board.

The Designated Consultant Nurse for Looked after Children represents the ICB at the Medway Corporate Parenting Board and provides the elected members with an understanding of the successes and challenges being experienced by children in

care and the services commissioned to support them. The Annual Report on the health of Looked After Children was received by the Board in July 2023.

A health sub-group to the Corporate Parenting Board was set up in October 2022 to provide a focus on health needs and outcomes. The sub-group is chaired by the Associate Director for Looked after Children and is attended by a range of professionals, foster carers, the advocacy service for our children in care. There is more to do in respect of ensuring timely health assessment for children when they first enter care. The statutory timeframe to complete Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) for children and young people is within 20 working days of them entering care. IHAs are part of an on-going process of care planning which provides a view of children's health. A report and health care plan that becomes integral to managing each child's health is completed to address existing and previously undiagnosed health concerns. Medway Community Healthcare (MCH) are commissioned to provide the looked after children specialist team that undertakes the statutory health assessments and other work as detailed in the statutory guidance for children and young people in the care of Medway Council. The services commissioned are for all our children and young people in the care of Medway local authority, therefore responsible for arranging health assessments for any of our children placed in or out of area. It must be recognised however, that it is not always possible to influence the timeline of providers in other areas who undertake the health assessment on our behalf.

Performance is currently below our target of 80% carried out within 20 working days but shows an improvement over the year to 75% in March 2024 compared to 26% in April 2023.

To improve performance, regular monitoring and tracking activity is taking place within the service, alongside bi monthly meetings with health colleagues.

Timely success to health assessments for those children placed outside of Medway continues to present a challenge, and this is raised at a national level with NHS England.

A Review Health Assessment (RHA) is required every year for children and young people over the age of 5 years in our care, and every six months for children under the age of 5 years. RHAs provide an opportunity to reassess the child's health, address any health needs identified and check that the previous action plan has been completed. It also provides an opportunity for the child/young person and/or carer to discuss health concerns; physical, sexual, or emotional. The target for review health assessments is 95%. • Timescales for RHAs was consistently over 90% last year. It should be noted that some older children choose not to participate in their review health assessment.

### **Dental Checks**

Performance for dental checks currently shows that 70% of children in care have an updated dental check within the last twelve months. The service monitors dental checks through regular performance clinics. Additional dental sessions are available to children in care with support for access.

### **Emotional Wellbeing**

Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (K&M ICB) have responsibility for ensuring access to mental health and emotional wellbeing support for children and young people.

Health provision for care leavers a substantial concern, including lack of timely MH provision.

Health partners have responded to concerns re care leavers, including a care leavers nurse offer, and Care Navigators. YP now have health histories and entitlements, including significantly extended care leaver offer.

### **Mental health services**

Children in Care are seen within a consultation clinic and seen within approximately 2 weeks of a referral. Children in Care are prioritised because of their status.

Referrals will have an initial assessment and personalised care plans, offering an array of evidence-based interventions either in groups or 1-1, medication management, consultation for the network around the CYP and/or risk support depending on presentation and level of need.

Kent and Medway children and young people's future mental health offer is currently being refreshed with wide participation and engagement events taking place to help shape this. The future service is intended to be "a wide range of face-to-face and online services to help keep children and young people well and support them and their families.

Children in care are currently accessing support from the refreshed Short Intervention Team

This service is available to children and young people who are accessing children's social care, including children in care and care leavers, who are aged 5-18, or 18-25 for care leavers or those with SEN. The short intervention therapy can be CBT, DBT and creative therapies.

Behavioural support will now be provided Family Action, known as Small Steps in Medway.

Children and young people, and their parents and carers, can get support both before and after assessment of ASC and ADHD. Those who do not meet the criteria for a formal diagnosis but still present with behavioural needs can also access support. The Positive Behavioural Support (PBS) offer is available to Medway Residents aged 5-19 years old, or up to 25-years-old for those with SEN. Small

Ofsted reported the following:

'Increasing numbers of care leavers benefit from the help and support provided by 'navigators. They help young people to access health services, support them with developing independence skills and reduce social isolation. Challenges remain, however, with the availability and accessibility of emotional and mental health support for care leavers. It is particularly difficult for care leavers to access support in this area if they were not previously receiving it as children. This can impact on their well-being during the early part of their adult lives. However, navigators are effective at supporting care leavers to access varying types of support. Senior leaders continue to develop and improve the local provision to meet this need.'

The Leaving Care service have worked with Medway Community Healthcare to develop a specific 'care leavers pathway' which allows for the allocated nurse to continue to support the young person's health needs until they are 19 years old. The team now attend the Children and Families Hub at the Elaine centre once a week and have a private room for any health discussions to take place at the Elaine Centre. The Personal Advisors also invite the Looked After Children's Nurses to any young people's pathway planning meetings that they feel would benefit from any health

support. The pathway promotes partnership working with the personal advisor to foster closer working relationships and avoid duplication for the young person.

**6. Aim to keep children in care and care leavers safe through the provision of trained, supported and motivated staff who understand and are alert to the potential for exploitation and abuse of young people and who take the right action at the right time.**

Corporate Parenting Board is mindful of the additional risks posed to children in care who are exploited or go missing.

Firmin definition of contextualised safeguarding is:

“An approach to understanding, and responding to, young people’s experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse”. It encompasses.

- Criminal Exploitation – including county lines.
- Sexual Exploitation – including peer on peer exploitation.
- Risk associated with gangs.
- Risk associated with radicalisation (Prevent)
- Online abuse
- Safeguarding risk in public spaces
- Trafficking and modern slavery.
- Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Medway Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (Medway Council, Kent Police and Medway ICB) and other relevant agencies have developed a contextualised safeguarding strategy and are responsible for monitoring, scrutinising and challenging services on performance in respect of child exploitation The contextualised safeguarding strategy is delivered through the Kent and Medway Joint Exploitation Group.

The Children in Care and Care Leavers Service implement missing and exploitation discussions as part of the contextualised safeguarding strategy. The discussions apply to any child aged 11 and over (consideration to younger children where appropriate). Each meeting will review the exploitation assessment tool, and the quality of the safety plan. The meetings aim is to ensure that risk is being identified and responded to appropriately.

Children who go missing from home or care are particularly vulnerable and potentially at serious risk of harm. Children’s services and Kent Police have a joint operating procedure and team guidance for children who go missing from Home and Care

All children who go missing must be offered the opportunity of an independent return home interview (RHI) which should be completed within 72 hours of a child being found. Children’s services have 2 return home interview officers to undertake RHIs to children within Medway. However, a child may request their own allocated worker to do this if they have one or this could be for example a youth worker or a teacher. The return home interview provides a child with a safe space to talk. They explore with the child why they went missing, what happened during the time that they were missing and discuss what needs to happen to prevent them from going missing again. They

record this information, and it is reviewed by the missing and exploitation co-ordinator to ensure trends and themes are effectively gathered.

Medway's performance figures for the period April 2023 March 2024 show that the total of 1974 (1862 in 22-23) missing incidents involved 458 (476 in 22-23) children over the 12-month period. This represents 97 (88 in 22-23) children in care who are the responsibility of Medway and 147 (105 in 22-23) children in care who are the responsibility of other local authorities but are placed in Medway. These 244 Children in Care have multiple incidents which make up approximately 77% of the occasions where children went missing.

Children's services have a specific process for managing those children who experience longer periods of absence, including the daily missing report, 'need to know' notifications and by additional management oversight of those children missing for longer periods of time.

Out of the 1291 Return Home Interviews conducted, 701 (85.7%) were completed in the 72-hour timescale. Performance across the whole cohort is adversely impacted by the timeliness of return home interviews to those children who are placed at a distance from Medway (63 children during this period). Medway's children in care placed at a distance had 422 missing incidents during this period. The number of Medway's children placed at a distance increased by 8 since 22-23. The distance from Medway and the number of repeat missing incidents for this cohort of children impacted on achieving the 72-hour timescale.

The most significant areas of risks identified for children who went missing relates to substance use, exploitation, and mental health.

## **7. Prepare young people for a successful transition to adulthood.**

A core corporate parenting responsibility is to support care leavers so that they can live successful independent lives and the Board has a corporate champion to support transition to independence. To support this work and generate better involvement in the "family business" the Board has a working group who meet monthly to ensure the care leaver offer remains a focus for all services within the Council and helps to finalise offers made by others. The Corporate Parenting Board, MCYPC and feedback from young people supports the discussions about what we can offer as a whole council. The rent guarantor scheme pilot was supported and agreed, the website for the local offer is being developed to be more young-person friendly and relevant, and there are ongoing discussions to firm up offers such as a reverse takeover day, work experience/job opportunities and offers to support in moving home, as some examples where a young person would benefit from additional transition support.

Corporate parenting board members are more aware of the challenges faced by young people transitioning into adulthood and independence and want to offer their involvement and support. The care leaver champions on the Board will meet with any young person who thinks they may be able to help or support them as part of their councillor role. There is interest from members of the corporate parenting board to be

trained as Mentors for care leavers as another support offer in the transition to adulthood, and the training is being designed and arranged with Medway Adult Education colleagues.

Medway has a Transitions Team who chair a monthly panel to consider all young people throughout children's services who will be turning 18 in the following 6 months. This identifies whether there is a Care Act eligibility need for the young person and what services can be provided and by whom. Social Workers and Personal Advisors work alongside the transition service to ensure that there is a clear plan to drive forward which is in the best interest of the young person. The Leaving Care Team are active members in the Preparing for Adulthood Project Board which includes members of the 16+ service and the adults services. This meeting is a collective board which looks at all aspects of adulthood and how we can better prepare young people and work collaboratively with the adult services.

Within the leaving care team there is now a dedicated team of PAs who lead on participation and engagement. The aim of this team is to promote the wellbeing and transition of all care leavers working towards reaching their full potential as an adult and progressing towards independence. This team includes specialist lead roles including an Accommodation Officer and the Aspirations Officer who support young people into independence.

Despite the increasing challenges with sufficiency of accommodation locally and nationally, the 16+ Service ensures every effort is taken to support young people to live in suitable accommodation. Currently 93% of our care leavers are living in suitable accommodation. The small number of young people living in unsuitable accommodation include those in custody and those living in emergency accommodation. The use of emergency accommodation is avoided wherever possible. Only in exceptional situations are such options used by the Council Housing team when young people have exhausted all other options.

The Accommodation Officer's role is to provide tenancy preparation sessions, supporting young people to increase their understanding of what it is needed to live independently or semi-independently. In addition, it is to offer individual sessions for young people and provide training to colleagues within the team on how to access particular types of housing.

The leaving care teamwork alongside housing colleagues, to ensure that young people's independent accommodation is suitable.

A monthly meeting with housing colleagues enables early transition planning to occur, this is chaired by the Service Manager Leaving Care. We have also secured a housing officer post within the service on a permanent basis.

The Corporate Parenting Children's and Housing Service Delivery Group meets monthly to ensure children and young people have access to a variety of accommodation choices to meet their needs and that young people are prepared for independent living and they have access to appropriate support and advice to assist them have support and advice to maintain and sustain their accommodation.

The group has refreshed joint housing protocol, implemented individual and group work programme for care leavers to enable them to understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants, alongside developed and implemented an independent living programme.

### **Financial Independence**

As corporate parents we want to ensure that our children and young people, are not disadvantaged by virtue of their care status. It is important that they can learn about good financial management, and security. There is an expectation that pocket money is provided to our young people, and older care experienced children are provided with financial support in line with the DWP guidelines directly into bank accounts. Children in care/care leavers have independent saving accounts or child trust funds. This means that every child in care for at least 12 months, will have saving paid directly into an ISA/Children's Trust Fund. This account is independent of any care givers and only accessible at 18 years of age by the young person.

Care leavers are also provided with financial support in a number of areas, including an increased setting up home allowance to £3000, home insurance (1<sup>st</sup> year), council tax exemption, and university accommodation.

Recognising the need to extend the support to include advice around health, finance, independent living and wellbeing has seen the introduction of external representatives coming into the Elaine Centre to offer targeted support to young people leaving care to help them successfully transition into adulthood.

### **8. Ensure that children in care and care leavers' views and experiences inform current and future service delivery.**

Being a corporate parent goes much further than protecting our children from harm, it places a responsibility upon us to ensure that: "*Children and young people are also valued and respected and can sustain healthy positive relationships*" (Principles of Corporate Parenting - Children and Social Work Act 2017).

Children and young people tell us having a trusted adult, either a foster carer, social worker or PA is key to them feeling cared for, listened to and safe.

### **Medway Children and Young People's Council (MCYPC)**

The interface between the CPB and the MCYPC has been strengthened. A representative of MCYPC attends CPB meetings and acts as a conduit for sharing the views of children and young people, supported to participate by a member of the Young Lives Foundation (YLF).

Children and young people have increased opportunities to share their views and experiences and influence improvements and service developments with corporate parents across the Council. Activity evenings, CPB take over days and other events, all provide opportunities to connect. Young people have developed challenge cards as a way of sharing their views and experiences of being in care, holding corporate parents to account, and to let senior managers and corporate parents know how they would like to see them improve support and services.

### **Mind of My Own**

Mind Of My Own (MOMO) has been implemented by Medway Council as a tool to encourage and support participation and engagement of children and young people. Social Workers, and independent reviewing officers are all expected to sign up to MOMO. The MOMO app encourages and enables our young people to express their views at any time, on anything they think is important to them.

The statements generated by a child//young person via MOMO, can then be responded to by the child's social worker. Through regular meetings with MOMO's engagement team, we monitor and track usage across service areas, and identify themes of areas of importance from our young people that we can then respond to. IROs and conference chairs speak with children / young people before all reviews and conferences, reminding and encouraging them to use Mind of My Own as a means of participation.

Social workers encourage young people to use Mind of My Own to prepare for all meetings, reviews, visits, or conferences.

The impact of the app has identified individual children who require additional support and or significant events that is responded to be each social worker and outcome recorded. For example, in the case of a young person who felt unsafe at school, extra monitoring was provided by the school and a network meeting identified additional resources.

Communication with social workers has increased and feedback provided on each statement received allows for greater monitoring and ensures the child's voice is clearly recorded.

#### **Time to Shine event.**

The Annual Time to Shine awards took place in 2023, attended by children in care and care experienced young people, supported by children's services staff, corporate staff and elected members. There were over 150 nominations for awards, and young people appreciated the opportunity.

'I really enjoyed Time to Shine. It really was perfect, and I was a winner which really shocked me but gave me a big confidence boost!'

*Young person who attended.*

#### **4. What impact have we had?**

- Elected members who sit on the CPB now have a clearer understanding of their roles. They have benefitted from the training and from being guided to better understand these roles.
- The nominated champions take an interest in their specific areas and have helped the Board to focus on specific issues, such as accommodation for our care leavers; listening to our children & young people; or the education of our children and young people.
- The Board has a thematic work plan which brings greater focus on specific areas and on the actions to address key areas for development. One of the champions takes the actions from each board meeting to follow up with children and young people.



- Children and young people have increased opportunities to share their views and experiences and influence improvements and service developments with corporate parents across the Council. Activity evenings, CPB take over days and other events, all provide opportunities to connect. Children and young people now influence discussions through their membership on the CPB, supported by the Young Lives Foundation.

## **5. Our programme for next year (2024-5)**

The Corporate Parenting Board has agreed a refreshed and updated Corporate Parenting Strategy this year, which was developed in consultation with young people; this will be monitored and reported on through the coming year.

Through consultation with a small group of children and young people the following priorities have been identified:

**PRIORITY 1:** Strengthen your voice and influence. By listening and engaging with you, we will use your experience to help us shape future services.

**PRIORITY 2:** Provide you and your family with support which will help you to return to live or remain with your families safely at home.

**PRIORITY 3:** Support you to live somewhere where you feel safe, and have a secure, long-term relationship with your carers, can get the most out of life, and have a sense of your identity and your history.

**PRIORITY 4:** Provide enough caring family homes in Medway for you so you can stay close to places which are important to you, as long as it is safe to do so.

**PRIORITY 5:** Improve your health and well-being by making sure you can access high quality health services.

**PRIORITY 6:** Be aspirational to help you to achieve your potential and have the same opportunities to achieve at school, university, or college as your peers. Support you when you leave care to be in employment, education, or training.

**PRIORITY 7:** Support you to develop your independence skills to enable you to thrive into adulthood.

**PRIORITY 8:** Provide you with opportunities to pursue your interests and hobbies.

The progress of the refreshed strategy will be monitored and tracked by the Corporate Parenting Board, supported by the Children's Services Management Team led by the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care