

# Corporate Parenting Board

20 June 2024

## Youth Voice Strategy for Care Experienced Children and Young People

### For Review and Consultation

**Portfolio Holder:**

Cllr. C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

**Local Councillor(s):**

N/A

**Executive Director:**

T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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**Report Status:** Public

**Brief Summary:**

This paper is providing an update on our responsibility as a corporate parent to listen, respond and act upon, the voices of our children in our care and our care leavers. The Youth Voice Team continue to lead this space.

**Recommendation:**

This report is to provide a service update.

**Reason for Recommendation:**

Corporate Parenting Board are invited to note and discuss the contents of this report.

## 1. **Update on The Network model**

- 1.1 The Network replaces the 'Children in Care Council' and 'Care Leaver Forum'. Young people have said that the language itself, can prevent them from taking part.
- 1.2 We want children in care and care leavers (our experts by experience) to feel a sense of belonging as a member of The Network. A place where they can show up as themselves and use their voice at different times and in different ways.
- 1.3 We want our young people to see and feel, how The Network reaches out to children and young people across the country and welcomes all 'sparkling differences'.
- 1.4 The Network exists to create an accessible way for as many people as possible to use their voice.
- 1.5 The Network is....
  - different for everyone
  - a safe space where children and young people are listened to
  - a space where we work on change together
  - where the experiences of children and young people make them experts
- 1.6 Increasing membership to The Network is both organic and done with purpose. The Youth Voice team works with their colleagues and partners (who already have safe and trusting relationships with children and young people) to enable the team to connect with more voices. Growing The Network requires a whole service approach.
- 1.7 A variety of safe spaces are offered for children and young people to be heard, using different methods of engagement. Asking them how they want to be involved and their preferred communication methods, shapes this. Examples of this might be texting, emailing, meeting in groups in person, meeting online, meeting at home, use of digital methods, creative story telling or very simply, a phone call. All of this is how The Network operates.

## 2. Key Activity

2.1 An annual survey is one of the ways that our care experienced children and young people lead the Youth Voice priorities and activities. The surveys, which focus on wellbeing, are conducted in partnership with Coram Voice ([Bright Spots Programme - Coram Voice](#)) who analyse the data and send the findings to the council. The Youth Voice Team have conversations across 'The Network' to work with children and young people to understand their priorities from the results. The team continue to work with The Network to co-design solutions, presenting these to Corporate Parenting Board for consideration and action.

2.2 The council will soon receive the latest results of the 2024 care leaver survey. Care leavers chose these top 4 priorities to work on with the Youth Voice Team, from their last survey.

- Being safe and settled in accommodation
- Having good health and wellbeing
- Relationships: having people for emotional support
- Making sure support works for all care leavers

This image shows how care leavers prioritised all areas from their last survey.

## What is most important to you?



2.3 The Youth Voice Team have supported care leavers to present solutions for their priorities to Corporate Parenting Board over the last year. Working on their solutions together, has led to the development of the actions in the Corporate Parenting Board action plan. An example of this is the work for priority 3:

- Care leavers said that relationships with their important people and having emotional support, was one of their top priorities from the Coram Voice Survey.

Examples of what care leavers said:

- *'help children and care leavers to go back and visit friends they may have lost touch with when they have moved as a result of being in care'*
- *'allow us to keep in touch with staff when they move on (with consent from both sides)'*
- *'staff allowed to keep in touch with care leavers on social media once past the age of 25'*
- *'some friends you can be really close to. It's important to me. You need friends you can trust to keep your information safe'*

Examples of what we are doing together:

- Their voices and ideas enabled a successful bid to the DFE Befriending and Mentoring Scheme and this project is now live, further employing 2 care leaver apprentices.
- 'Staying in Touch' guidance is in development, to help young people to stay in touch with the important people they have met during their care journey.
- Trialling the use of an app to help people stay in touch safely.

2.4 The team have been able to strengthen their reach to the adults who have the safe and trusting relationships with our children and young people, by welcoming an additional Youth Voice Officer 6 months ago. This has increased the opportunity to meet with more teams, present at events, develop training for the workforce and review the effectiveness of current engagement strategies. The result is that we are getting to build relationships with more children and young people and hear more voices.

2.5 Another way the team meet younger children, is by hosting fostering family events with the Virtual School and Fostering teams. These are held 6

times a year across the county and always involve a fun activity combined with a voice activity.

This picture is from a fostering family day held at Avon Heath Country Park in February 2024 and the craft activity focussed on emotional wellbeing. Children made happiness jars and 'amazing me' hangings, exploring the theme around 'what to do on a difficult day'.



### 3. **Forward Plan and Identified Areas for Continued Improvement**

3.1 [The Dorset Promise](#) has been co-produced with children and young people and recently reviewed and updated. To embed The Promise in all that we do, there will be a comprehensive communication plan to ensure that children and young people are fully informed and can hold us to account in how we all deliver it.

3.2 Achieving more diversity in the voices heard, is always the ambition of the Youth Voice Team and continuous improvement is sought in this area. Examples of this are:

- The team will be delivering webinars to the registered managers of the homes where our children live in residential care. This is so that those children can be supported and encouraged to join The Network, becoming change makers too.
- The team will have a focus on hearing the voices of more young men in 24/25.
- A youth voice officer was recruited last year to hear the voices of children and young people with more complex needs (those with a special educational need or disability).

- The team are recruiting an additional youth voice officer to hear the voices of children and young people who have arrived in the UK through a resettlement pathway or seeking asylum.

- 3.1 Recruitment of a Network Board (experts by experience) who will become an integral part of Corporate Parenting Board, providing support and scrutiny to members. The Network Board will hold Corporate Parenting Board to account on the delivery of their strategy and action plan. The Network Board will work with Corporate Parenting Board to create a new format and agenda that lends itself to a more equal space of shared power.
- 3.2 We will be working with the Hadley Trust to consider how we can embed the data from the Bright Spots Programme across our data collection systems, making sure that we are also reporting on the areas that are most important to children and young people.
- 3.3 The In My Shoes training (which young people have co-produced and currently deliver in person 4 times per year), will also become deliverable in 4 modules. This will increase the reach of adults hearing the messages from our children and young people about being care experienced and can also be delivered online.
- 3.5 The team have recently set up a youth friendly web space using the council's newly procured consultation platform; [Youth voice - Dorset Council - Citizen Space](#). This has the capacity to become a great place to strengthen the feedback loop to young people and show more publicly, the impact they have.

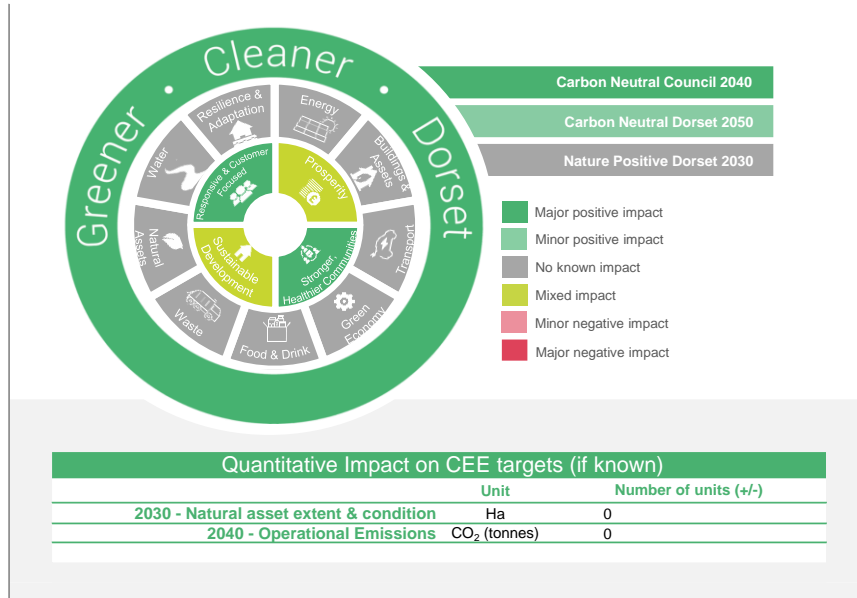
#### 4. **Financial Implications**

Ideas and recommendations are mostly achieved within the current Youth Voice budget. Some activities share financial resources with the Virtual School and Fostering Team.

#### 5. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

Children and young people have told us that they primarily choose to work in person, rather than online. We work in a relational, accessible, and inclusive way which means that we will travel to be with young people where they are. Many young people do not like to meet as a group or will

find this dynamic difficult, so we will meet with them 1:1 if this needs to happen so they can participate and engage in youth voice activities.



## 6. Wellbeing and Health Implications

There is improved health and wellbeing for children and young people when they are given a safe space to be listened to and their views taken seriously. This is also a place where new friendships are made.

We take a trauma informed approach to our work and young people are not expected to share their stories. Without question, we must do no harm in our engagement and participation work, always measuring this risk in projects.

Being trauma informed also means that children and young people are fully informed about an engagement space before taking part and then there is also the space for 'checking in' with them after their participation. The language we use and how we act around children and young people are equally important in making sure 'we do no harm'.

## 7. Other Implications

Children and young people may make disclosures during the work that the team do with them, as lived experience is explored. Safeguarding concerns may also become apparent as relationships become more established, with trust and feelings of safety being built.

8. **Risk Assessment**

8.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low overall – with ‘risk of harm’ being medium

9. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

This is not a new policy area therefore no EQIA is not required.

10. **Appendices**

**Accessible Table of Impacts and Table of Recommendations**

**ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS**

<b>Natural Environment, Climate &amp; Ecology Strategy Commitments</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact

<b>Corporate Plan Aims</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Prosperity	neutral
Stronger healthier communities	strongly supports it
Sustainable Development & Housing	neutral
Responsive & Customer Focused	strongly supports it

**TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Responses -will this be incorporated into your proposal? How? And if not, why not?</b>



<b>Energy</b>	
No recommendations found for this category	
<b>Buildings &amp; Assets</b>	
No recommendations found for this category	
<b>Transport</b>	
No recommendations found for this category	
<b>Green Economy</b>	
No recommendations found for this category	
<b>Food &amp; Drink</b>	
No recommendations found for this category	
<b>Waste</b>	
No recommendations found for this category	
<b>Natural Assets &amp; Ecology</b>	
No recommendations found for this category	
<b>Water</b>	
No recommendations found for this category	
<b>Resilience &amp; Adaptation</b>	
No recommendations found for this category	

11. **Background Papers**

N/A

12. **Report Sign Off**

11.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)