

Corporate Parenting Board

28 May 2026

Youth Voice Strategy for Care Experienced Children and Young People

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr C Sutton, Children, Families & Education

Local Councillor(s): N/A county wide

Senior Leadership Team:

P Dempsey - Executive Director, Children's Services

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Statutory Authority: This paper is for information rather than requiring a decision so this section is not applicable.

Report status: Public Choose an item.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This paper provides an update on our responsibility and duty as a corporate parent to listen, respond and act upon the voices of our care experienced children and young people. The paper also reflects on how we feedback to young people on the progress we are making about the things that are important to them. This report covers the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.
- 1.2 The Youth Voice Team continue to facilitate The Network¹, a space led and shaped by care experienced children and young people whose lived experience guides our work. All work is underpinned by the Lundy Model of Participation² ensuring children and young people are given space, supported to express their voice, listened to by the right audience and supported to influence decisions. This model fully upholds article 12 of the UNCRC.

¹ [Dorset Youth Voice – including details about The Network](#)

² [Lundy Model of Participation – UNICEF website](#)

- 1.3 This report highlights how children and young people in The Network, have made an impact and what we are doing next based on their feedback.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 This report provides a service update only, therefore there are no recommendations.

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 Not applicable

4. **The report**

- 4.1 Impact and influence of young people:

- a) Participation levels remain consistent, reflecting sustained engagement. Young people continue to be involved in ways that allow them to use their strengths and talents. On average, 21 young people take part in The Network each quarter. Across the year, 36 different young people have contributed their thoughts, wishes and feelings with the Youth Voice Team, volunteering more than 500 hours between them. Of this 36, 8 are unaccompanied young people, with only 6 are under 18.
- b) The 'new to care' booklet co-produced with young people, is now complete and ready to help other children in care know their rights and the support available to them.
- c) Young people co-designed with the IRO Service Manager, a training session about identity. This has helped the workforce to have a better understanding of how complex identity is for care experienced young people and the intersectionality of this. Since October 2025, 58 people have received the identity training with further sessions planned with the Birth to Settled Adulthood team, foster carers and Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) social workers.
- d) 'In My Shoes' video³ was co-produced and launched during National Care Leaver's month in November 2025. This further supported the acknowledgement of Care Day in 2026⁴ with the video being shared publicly on social media and directly with education providers.
- e) 'In My Shoes' art exhibition⁵ and 'talking tables' activity during National Care Leaver's month, was supported by local MP's, the leader of Dorset Council Cllr Nick Ireland, chair of Dorset Council Cllr Stella Jones and Dorset Council's Chief Executive, along with several members of the Children's senior leadership team. From this, one MP took a young person's comment about protected

³ <https://youtu.be/iJ-tdfcVZLc>

⁴ [Dorset Care leavers share stories in powerful film | Dorset Echo](#)

⁵ ["In My Shoes" exhibition Dorset Council news article](#)

characteristics to Parliament, and this could be viewed by young people via a live stream.

- f) 'In My Shoes' workforce training continues to deliver impact and is shaped and informed by the work we do with young people. Just over 100 people have attended the In My Shoes training in the last year, including the Children in Care Nursing team, members of fostering panels and adults involved in the mentoring program for care leavers.
- g) Corporate Parenting Board data set has been improved with language that cares and feels better for young people. We now aim to embed their work from the Ask Me What Matters project⁶ into our digital systems so that the data set is enhanced with what matters most to them.
- h) A Network member recorded a podcast with colleagues in Quality Assurance about record keeping. They shared the impact of reading their records and why writing to the child with language that cares is so important. This podcast is shared with the children's services workforce.
- i) A Network member presented to town mayors about corporate parenting and how they can consider their role as corporate parents in their communities.
- j) The Networks art exhibitions have travelled around Dorset and continue to have an impact, long after the formal exhibitions have closed. This continues to raise the profile of care experienced young people and tackle stigma.
- k) A Network Ambassador has supported recruitment activities in the IRO Service.

4.2 Wider strategic impact:

- a) The team has sustained participation with our unaccompanied young people thanks to a fixed term grant funded position.
- b) Decision makers are consistently present at workshops with The Network.
- c) The Youth Voice Team have updated the corporate parenting learning module, informed by lived experience. We are exploring an opportunity to make this a mandatory module for the Dorset Council workforce, as care experience is one of our locally adopted protected characteristics.
- d) The terms of reference for the Workforce Development Board have been updated to now include the Youth Voice Manager as a representative. The board have now received presentations on Children's Rights and the Ask Me What Matters project, with related objectives and actions being adopted by the board. The actions cover the following themes:

⁶ [Ask Me What Matters - Coram Voice website](#)

- **Becoming a rights-respecting, values-led workforce**
Workforce development is being strengthened to operate consistently within a children's rights framework, embedding UNCRC principles and the Dorset Promise across recruitment, training, commissioning and leadership practice.
- **Meaningful participation of children and young people**
Children and young peoples lived experiences and voices are being actively embedded within learning design, delivery, quality assurance and promotion.
- **Lived experience-informed learning**
Training and induction increasingly centre on the real experiences of children in care and care-experienced young people, using approaches such as *In My Shoes* to deepen understanding, empathy and reflective practice across the workforce.
- **Stronger leadership, accountability and transparency**
Clear mechanisms are being developed to connect Corporate Parenting Board priorities with workforce development activity, improve information sharing, and increase visibility of how learning, feedback and board direction translate into tangible change.
- **Quality, impact and continuous improvement**
The focus is shifting from delivery alone to demonstrable impact, with improved quality assurance, post-training evaluation and rights-based assessment of commissioned training.

4.3 What we have learnt from young people to help set priorities for the year ahead:

- a) The feedback loop to young people over the last year has vastly improved. However, there are still times when they remain unsure about what has happened with what they said and whether this made a difference. We continue to support decision makers to feedback to young people so that participation remains purposeful and fully upholds article 12 of the UNCRC.
- b) In continuing to strengthen the feedback loop, the Youth Voice Team will be using Citizen's Space every quarter to increase public transparency about the impact young people have.
- c) The Network continues to feedback on how well Corporate Parenting Board works for them. The Youth Voice Team will work alongside decision makers and councillors to continue to develop and strengthen this space. Co-design sessions will be hosted in the summer to reflect on the last year and strengthen this space.

- d) Through the Coram Survey, we have learnt that we need to hear more from our 8 to 11 year olds and this will be a focus for the year ahead.
- e) Youth Voice is everyone's business. Partnerships with external and internal colleagues are key in hearing both breadth and depth of voices. The Youth Voice team will continue to seek opportunities to increase this way of working.
- f) Themed events are a great opportunity to increase engagement which has been successful with care leavers and their annual art exhibition. The Youth Voice team plan to use a similar model for Care Day to engage younger voices.
- g) When young people feel confident in using their voice and can see and feel the impact they have, a success indicator is that they begin to demand more opportunities which are youth led. One example of this is the National Care Leavers month exhibition. In response to this, in 2026 we are seeking to give a grant to a community art organisation to facilitate the project with young people.

Young people involved will be able to achieve the Arts Award Explorer⁷ if they wish to and those living across the country can be supported to take part. The art organisation will use a 6-stage trauma informed approach. This allows space for emotional safety, trust, expression, meaning making and closure – keeping everyone safe in the creative process.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 Not applicable as there are no recommendations to be considered.

6. Legal considerations

6.1 The Children and Families Act 2014 states that local authorities must have regard to:

- the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people
- their participation as fully as possible in decisions
- providing support and information to enable that participation

Whilst this applies particularly to special education needs and disability (SEND), it sets a wider expectation of active involvement, not just consultation.

6.2 If we aren't systematically using children's voices to shape services, we are at risk of not meeting our statutory duties around welfare, participation, and child-centred practice.

⁷ [Arts Award Explore qualification](#)

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7. Financial implications

- 7.1 Ideas and recommendations from children and young people are mostly achieved within the Youth Voice budget. Some activities, like the art exhibition, require shared financial resources with other teams.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 8.1 Climate wheel not required.

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 There can be improved health and wellbeing for children and young people when they belong and matter in safe, trauma informed spaces. The Network is also a place where new friendships are made
- 9.2 Young people are not expected to share their stories. It is recognised that there is a cost to young people when they bring their lived experiences into a space, and this must be given due care and consideration. Young people may find some projects and conversations difficult but when held safely with co-regulating adults, The Network can be a place for healing.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 Children and young people may make disclosures to the Youth Voice Team, as safe and trusting relationships are built. Children and young people will be supported by their key worker, who would be informed of any disclosures. Officers have space in their 1:1's to reflect on the impact the work has on them, along with access to Dorset Council's wellbeing offer for further support.

11. Risk implications

- 10.2 Having considered the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

12. Equalities

12.1 No equality impact implications that require an assessment.

13. Appendices

13.1 None

14. Background papers

14.1 None

15. Report sign-off

15.1 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)