

Croydon Corporate Parenting Strategy

2023 - 2025

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Foreword



Debbie Jones

Strategic Director Children's Services

I am pleased to introduce our new Whole Council and Partnership Corporate Parenting Strategy. In Croydon we have widely consulted and galvanised relationships across the Directorates in the Council and with our Partners to deliver an ambitious programme of work. Care Experienced Young People and Children Looked After have told us what they want to focus on with us and we have listened. Croydon's corporate parenting three-year strategy will be driven by our new Corporate Parenting Board and approach. Young people will co-produce, advise and challenge us on our delivery and progress. The four priority areas provide the overarching framework to drive improvement and assess progress in delivering our high ambitions for our children looked after and care leavers.



Councillor Maria Gatland

Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

We want Croydon children looked after and care experienced young people to grow up with stable, warm, and loving homes that offer the range of care that reflects the diversity of need. As corporate parents we have a special responsibility to make sure children and young people who may have had disrupted experiences of family life get the support they need to live the happiest and healthiest lives possible. As lead member for children's services and a corporate parent, I want to ensure we all have high aspirations for our children looked after and care experienced young people. To ensure we provide the best services and support we must work together across directorates in the council and with our partners to develop and improve services that meet the right needs at the right time. I welcome Croydon's corporate parenting strategy which outlines our vision, principles with a focus on improving the life chances and wellbeing of children and young people with a whole council and partnership Corporate Parenting approach.

Executive summary

Introduction

In Croydon we have undertaken a thorough self-assessment of our approach and delivery of services to children looked after and care experienced young people. This process has paid attention to the voices of children and young people, what they have told us about what they want and need. In addition, we have heard from our colleagues, partners and government feedback and incorporated all of these views into a plan of action to respond and improve.

Key message

1. We need a whole council and partnership approach to make a real difference to the experiences and life chances of our children looked after and care experienced young people.
2. Children and young people must be listened to, respected and be a part of the solution. We are recruiting a Co-Chair to our Corporate Parenting Board and Ambassadors to advise and challenge in our improvement activity related to the four priority areas.
3. We are co parents and grandparents to the children and young people we care for. Wherever it is possible we will continue to work with birth, adoptive and connected families and significant relationships to build stability and a sense of belonging that allows children and young people to flourish.
4. We must adhere to the legal framework that requires us to the key corporate parenting principles to our care and delivery of services. Creating vulnerability for families and children post order and impacting upon stability of permanence for some children.
5. Priority area, Housing. As corporate parents we want our children to have the best start in life and to experience a supportive and positive transition into interdependence. This includes good preparation for living independently, choice of area, quality of housing to create a new home. As co-parents we need to have a flexible approach when young people make mistakes and need support and guidance.
6. Priority area, Education, Employment, Training. Priority area, Education, Employment, Training. We want to ensure children and young people can learn and develop, attend, and engage, attain, and achieve at every stage of their learning journey from their earliest years to school, to further and higher education, for work experience, training, apprenticeships, employment, and further education.
7. Priority area, Permanence, Stability. When they cannot live with their parents, we will secure the best plan to meet their needs in their timescales. Wherever possible children and young people will experience their home and care in the borough of Croydon. When this is not possible it will be important to ensure that every effort is made to maintain and support links with family, significant others, and community.
8. Priority area, Health and Adult Transitions. Our children will be safeguarded and protected, they will experience improved health and wellbeing and positive transitions into adulthood. They will enjoy and thrive in their communities of choice.
9. We will evaluate and update this strategy from the learning and experiences of delivering on the four priority areas.

Introduction

‘To be helped to succeed in education, to travel beyond Croydon and see the world, to have experiences with our friends, family and the professionals that work with us. These are important and make us happy’.

Feedback from children and young people - January 2023

All children deserve to be cared for, respected, listened to and supported. To feel safe and loved. All children deserve opportunity and support to grow into happy and successful adults. Our Children in Care and Care Leavers are no different, but without a stable family to support them, and often having experienced trauma, they face more challenges in achieving their aspirations.

As Co-corporate parents, it is our responsibility to be the supportive parent in times when birth, adoptive parents or carers are unable to fulfil this role. For those young people with their own children, we need to become ‘Co-corporate grandparents’.

This responsibility is not just with social workers and professionals who work directly with children and young people but is a ‘Whole Council and Partnership Approach’, council staff, elected Members and partners. We want everyone to read this strategy and ask themselves: **“What can I do in my role to help children and young people in and leaving care?”**

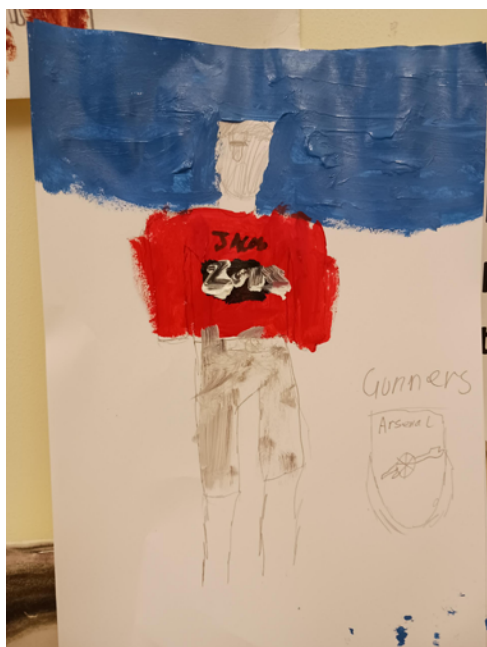


Image 1: Arsenal FC painting



Image 2: Painted hand print

Our legal duty

Social care, education and health services are committed to supporting children to remain within their families where possible, only using care for the right children, at the right time. When children or young people are unable to live with their parents or guardians, it is the duty of local authorities to care for them with our partners. As established in the Children Act 1989. Corporate parenting principles are set out in the Children & Social Care Act 2017 as below:

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- 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.
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

The Children Act 1989 also places a duty on the council's partners, including Health, Education and Housing services, to provide help, support, and provide services to ensure that the wider Corporate Parenting responsibilities are achieved. The Governments response to the Care Review supports this approach. We need a whole system approach and effective partnerships so that we can succeed in supporting children and young people in care and leaving care, in all aspects of their lives, no matter where they live in Croydon. We must also create supportive links with our partners when our children and young people live in other Local Authorities.



Image 3: Holding hands painting



Image 4: Drawing of a girl

Our pledge

The Pledge outlined below was created by children looked after and care experienced young people leading up to 2020. This Pledge was not launched due to Covid but forms the basis of more recent consultation and feedback that has been undertaken by the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers and other focussed consultation events as highlighted below:

Croydon's Looked After Children and Care Experienced Young Person Pledge. 2020

Our commitments to you as our Looked after Children:

1. Help you with your social life and to keep contact with your family where safe to do so.
2. We will help you to access positive social and educational activities.
3. We will make sure your learning continues into later life by supporting you to consider higher education.
4. We will provide you with a place to live that is safe and happy for you.
5. We will provide you with the right help to meet all your needs and to celebrate who you are.
6. We will support you in moving on from care and prepare you for living independently.
7. We will make sure we know your needs and review our plans to meet them regularly.
8. We will involve you in decisions which affect you and we will take your wishes and feelings taken into account.
9. We will ensure you have a social worker/personal advisor, to support you, and for you to be able to contact them easily.
10. We will support you to return home if it safe and right for you.
11. We will ensure you have access to high quality good education at all stages of your childhood.
12. If you request it, we will help you see the records we hold about you.
13. We will respect you as an individual with your own identity.

Our promise

I will show that I Hear you by:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listening to your views• Exploring ways to achieve what you want
I will show that I See you by	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visiting when I say I will• Noticing how you are feeling
I will show that I care about you by	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Worrying about your safety• Remembering important events for you, such as your Birthday

Our strategic priorities

The following strategic priorities reflect what we know we need to improve on over the next three years to fulfil our role as Corporate Parents, driving a 'Whole Council Approach' with our partners through the oversight of the Corporate Parenting Board. Our care experienced young people will have input as Co-Chair and Ambassadors, to influence and shape the agenda and activity so that we retain a focus on what really matters to them and their future.

Our children and care experienced young people have told us the following more recently which has informed the Strategic Priorities:

- **They want Commitment:**

For our children looked after and care experienced young people to feel that they are seen that they are heard, and that they are cared for by their corporate parents.

- **They want Togetherness:**

For relationships between children, and their social workers, Personal Advisors and foster carers, to be respected and nurtured, and for it to be understood that these relationships are as important when a young person turns 18 years old. To recognise the importance of children's family relationships and life stories.

- **Listen to voices of those that work closely with us:**

For the voices of those that work closest with our children and young people to be heard and taken account of, and for all parts of the council to work together to deliver improvements in services to them, especially in respect of housing.

Achieving ambitions and aspirations with you

We will achieve your ambitions and aspirations with you through:

- Strong leadership, commitment to co-parenting with your family and connected carers, driving improvements through robust performance management and a focus on what works best for you.
- We will monitor and develop our equalities improvements against our Equalities Impact Assessment.
- We will build on our engagement and involvement of children, and care experienced young people, in developing and implementing this strategy.
- We will promote an inclusive and effective partnership working across Croydon Council with support from identified elected members to each priority theme.

Key priority areas

- Housing
- Education, Employment, Training
- Permanence Stability
- Health and Adult Transitions

Strategic Priority 1

Housing

Vision

Parents want their children to have the best start in life and to experience a supportive and positive transition into interdependence. This includes good preparation for living independently, choice of area, quality of housing to create a new home. Parents need to have a flexible approach when young people make mistakes and need support and guidance.

Croydon's challenges

Croydon is operating within exceptional financial constraints. The Housing provision across the organisation requires reorganisation and a creative approach to develop a range of affordable and quality housing provision to meet the diversity of need within the borough. The offer to care experienced young people to date has not been consistently good and reflected the level of need and responsibility. As a Corporate Parent, promoting a

whole council approach to ensuring that care experienced young people have the support and opportunity to live in an area with good quality affordable housing that will promote life chances and increase wellbeing and stability. We also need to acknowledge the needs of those care experienced young people who have lived outside of Croydon Borough and choose to remain in the same area in which they have been cared for. Croydon needs to build relationships and reciprocal arrangements to ensure that these young people have the same opportunities and access to good quality support and housing provision to create a home and stability into early adulthood.

What we will do:

- We will ensure that the Housing Service and Childrens Social Care will have a joint protocol that develops a consistent approach to care experienced young people's needs and uses a common language that promotes care experienced young people's ability to engage with developing choice, suitable homes, and support.
- We will develop a range of housing options that reflects the diversity of needs and what young people tell us they need to learn, create stable homes and are able to enjoy being a Croydon resident and part of community life.
- We will provide a co-located Housing Officers, Benefits Officers, and Support staff to facilitate good housing, maximising of benefits and support to move home and retain a tenancy.
- We will provide council properties that are furnished with appliances and crucial items. We will work with partners to improve access to good quality and cost-effective home items. Provide pre and ongoing tenancy support to develop tenancy expectations, skills and good neighbour and community awareness.
- We will work with housing associations and charities to expand the development of homes for Care Experienced young people and build greater capacity in partnership working.
- We will promote greater preparation and support to ensure that care experienced young people have the requisite life skills to create a stable home and enjoy community life.

How will we know we have been successful?:

- Care Experienced young people will experience a caring and responsive Corporate Parenting approach from the Housing Department and Children's Care when in need of a stable home and support into early adulthood.
- Measure-young people will tell us. The outcomes from contact evidence a positive and timely outcome.
- Care Experienced young people have choice and good quality housing provision to meet their needs.
- Measure-Data including complaints and Quality Assurance Audits evidence improvements in choice and quality of housing provision. Children's Social Care and Housing agreed joint reporting with tangible evidence points agreed.
- Care Experienced young people have prompt, informative housing advice and support and have access to advice to maximise their benefits claims.

- Measure-Data and feedback evidence improvements to young people's access to suitable housing and benefits.
- Measure-Care experienced young people will report greater input, focus and support to prepare for leaving care and whilst they adjust to a more independent living arrangement
- Measure-Effective working practice indicators agreed with Housing and Childrens Social Care to monitor joint working practice and impact for young people.

Key partners for this strategic priority are:

- Housing Services Personnel
- Department of Work and Pensions
- Children's Social Care Personnel
- Fostering staff, foster carers inhouse and independent Fostering providers.
- Residential providers
- Housing and Children's social care services commissioners
- Police
- Community Safety Partnership

Strategic Priority 2

Education, Training and Employment Opportunities. Actively supporting and encouraging.

Vision

Parents want their children to have the best start in life and to reach their full potential. Croydon is an ambitious London Borough for all its children and young people and, like any good parent, has high aspirations for the children in our care and for our care experienced young people as they move into adulthood.

Our vision is to ensure that all aspects of our children's education from early childhood development to preparation for adulthood and independence are a top priority for all those involved in the lives of our children and young people.

We want to ensure they can learn and develop, attend, and engage, attain, and achieve at every stage of their learning journey from their earliest years to school, to further and higher education, for work experience,

training, apprenticeships, employment, and further education. We want them to have access to the best opportunities in and out of our borough to ensure they have the very best chances in life.

As leaders responsible for ensuring that the local authority discharges its duty to promote the educational achievement of their children, the Chief Executive of the Council, the Lead Member for Children and Families and the Director of Children's Services will ensure that creating a culture of high educational aspirations for children in care and care experienced young people across the council and its partners is given priority.

Croydon's challenges

Croydon has achieved good educational outcomes and high standards for many of our children in care and care experienced young people, but we acknowledge we can and should do more.

We need to continue to improve the equality of access to educational settings and especially where children and young people have need of specialist provision.

To continue to develop the support provided through our well-established Virtual School to raise attainment and to promote opportunities for children where they can achieve success through apprenticeships and alternative learning pathways.

Developing a greater range of opportunities, internal and external for Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people to realise their ambitions.

As Corporate Co-Grandparents we also need to ensure that young parents and their children, our grandchildren, are given every additional support and opportunity to engage with learning and employment, recognising that this will enhance the whole family's life chances in our challenging economic climate.

We also need to recognise and support the needs of those children and young people who are looked after for shorter periods of time and return to their birth families or live with connected carers.

As Corporate Parents we understand the additional provisions required by our children who have special educational needs and/ or disabilities. With the engagement of our wider council SEND strategy, we will develop a further range of specific opportunities for these children and young people to enable them to realise their potential. We recognise that we can provide more diversity and creativity to this arena through a 'Whole Council and Partnership' approach.

Our council, as in national policy, is also firmly focussed on increasing our Education, Employment and Training rates for all Children in Care and Care Experienced young people. We have specialist teams working on developing a comprehensive offer of support and engagement locally.

We will also ensure that all Children in Care and Care Experienced young people, living out of area, have equally good access and provision in their local areas through monitoring guidance and support of the Virtual school and soon to be established college.

What we will do:

- We will continue to focus on improving educational outcomes and EET rates for Children in care and care experienced young people. Our aim is to ensure all 16-year-olds have a suitable and appropriate education or employment/training option.
- A Corporate Parenting, Council Wide, approach will promote mental health and wellbeing as a core foundation to support children and young people in accessing education. This will include listening and responding to the voices of children and young people in relation to what supports them to succeed and achieve.
- We will support this ambition through developing and delivering a programme of training and awareness about the educational needs and outcomes of our cohort for all Council members, officers, and partners.
- We will continue to drive improvements in the quality and impact of the Personal Education Plan as part of a Corporate Parenting council and partner approach. This will create a foundation to support children and care experienced young people to access high quality employment, training, and further education.
- We will create a virtual college that builds upon the work of the virtual school and continues to aspire, track and support care experienced young people to access a range of opportunities.

How will we know we have been successful?:

- All children in care continue to have a high-quality personal education plan and pathway plan that sets out how they will be supported to achieve their potential at every age and stage.
- Measure-children and young people will tell us what they need. The outcomes detailed in PEPs and pathway plans are seen in children and young people's life successes and opportunities.
- More Children in care and Care Experienced young people will be supported to access and sustain higher education opportunities or relevant apprenticeships, employment-based routes, including the re-establishment of in house apprenticeships on site
- Measure-Data including destination collection, PEPs, complaints and Quality Assurance Audits evidence improvements in the number and diversity of Care Experienced young people accessing and sustaining further education or employment
- Children and Care Experienced young people will have their Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (SDQ, mental health and wellbeing assessment) assessed and incorporated into their PEP plans recognising the correlation between wellbeing and educational achievement.
- Measure-Data and feedback evidence improvements to young people's access to appropriate emotional and wellbeing support that supports them to enjoy and achieve in education, training, and employment.

Key Partners for this strategic priority are:

- Virtual School
- Virtual College
- Education Providers
- SEND service.
- Access to Education Service
- Social work – area teams and children Looked After Services
- Fostering, Kinship and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Services
- Residential Services
- Education Services and Croydon Education Partnership
- 16+ Service
- Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service
- Youth Justice Service
- Employers
- Colleges
- Employment, Skills & Economic Development • Planning & Sustainable Regeneration

Strategic priority 3

Permanence, stability

Vision

Croydon Council and partners will work together to secure children's futures with their families wherever possible. When they cannot live with their parents, we will secure the best plan to meet their needs in their timescales. Wherever possible children and young people will experience their home and care in the borough of Croydon. When this is not possible it will be important to ensure that every effort is made to maintain and support links with family, significant others, and community. We will create stability, care, and love in the lives of the children and young people we care for. We will listen to children and young people and incorporate their views and wishes into their plans and lived experiences.

Croydon's challenges

Croydon like many Local Authorities, particularly in London, strive to create sufficient homes for children and young people to reflect the diversity of need. We have achieved Permanence for many children and young people but need to become better at recognising when situations become fragile and risk the stability of a

consistent home and caring experience for children and young people. We need to build more resilience into assessments and support for children, young people, carers, and partners.

What we will do:

- Listen to our looked after children and care experienced young people.
- Review our (sufficiency) strategy to ensure that there are a range of homes and locations to meet the diversity of need for our children and young people. We will review the strategy robustly and regularly to ensure that it meets current and projected need.
- Continue to develop and improve our inhouse and partnership arrangements to ensure that permanency and stability is an experience that all children and care experienced young people can achieve. This partnership will include the views and needs of a range of families involved in a child's life.
- To develop training and skill development for social work, aligned professionals, council wide corporate parents and community partners, in assessing and planning where home circumstances and care is fragile. Seeking and proposing positive solutions, incorporating children, young people, family, and carers wishes and feelings into plans and interventions.
- Develop a range of support offers (people, programmes, approach) to deploy to increasing stability where circumstances are fragile. Creating equality of opportunity for all children and young people to experience a stable home and care.

How will we know we have been successful?:

- Children and young people will live in stable and well supported homes.
- Measure-children and young people will tell us what they need. We will agree with children how they will know we have listened to their needs. The outcomes detailed in care and pathway plans will have demonstrable impact upon children and young people's stability, life chances and ambitions. Matching data and auditing information for longer term care arrangements will be developed and monitored.
- More Children looked after and Care Experienced young people will be supported to live in or close to Croydon.
- Measure-Data and Quality Assurance Audits evidence improvements in the range of placement choice, matching decisions, incorporating children and young people's views and wishes, when considering what homes, care and support will realise the best opportunity for a stable and loving home.
- We will ensure that our workforce and partners are equipped to identify and support care arrangements to be robust, stable and caring. We will further develop our practice and resources to create more stability of home and care.
- Measure-Data and Quality Assurance Audits evidence improvements to creating stability for children and care experienced young people.

Key Partners for this strategic priority are:

- Health Services
- Police
- Community Safety Partners.
- Children's Commissioning Service
- Adults and Health Commissioning Service
- Social work teams.
- Placements Team
- Foster Carers and Fostering Service
- Children's Residential Services
- Housing
- Independent Placement Providers
- Independent Reviewing Officers.
- Community partners

Strategic priority 4

Health and adult transitions

Vision

Our children want us to value them, care for them and promote healthy relationships with their families and significant people in their life. They want us to ensure that their life stories are developed, understood, and promote their identity development which will underpin their mental and emotional wellbeing. Our children will be safeguarded and protected, they will experience improved health and wellbeing and positive transitions into adulthood. They will enjoy and thrive in their communities of choice.

Croydon's challenges

Many of our children and young people who are in care or care experienced, have had a difficult start in life. Life expectancy and the likelihood of developing physical and mental health problems are strongly linked to their experiences of neglect, abuse and trauma. Families' experiences of access to services and support impact upon their ability to care for their children which can amplify the risks of health inequalities. Children and young people who are care experienced are more likely to develop problems with their physical and mental health and suffer health inequalities if they have faced one or more of the following, with risk increasing as more than one of the following are experienced: the child, young person needs to be looked after in the care system; they are new to the country and asylum seekers; they have experienced trauma; they are excluded from school;

they have special education needs; they live in poverty; or they have experienced the youth justice system.

The effect of poor physical and mental health and health inequalities impacts throughout people's lives. Transitions into adulthood can be impacted upon by these vulnerabilities. It is strongly linked to the ability to achieve and attain within education, and employment and the ability to create and sustain a home and family life.

What we will do:

- We will listen to our children and act upon their feedback.
- We will use our practice framework, to promote emotional healing and to support our children and young people to be able to cope with the pressure's life brings. We will support children in care and care leavers to improve their health and wellbeing and will provide services and a high standard of support to meet their needs including their physical, mental and sexual health. We will create a health pathway for our Care Experienced young people that reflects what they will need as they transition into adulthood. We will know these areas are being achieved when all of our children and young people have access to the health services they need.
- We will create a robust Adult Transitions Pathway that is clear to all and is built upon a proactive partnership between Children and Adult Services. Delivering a smooth transition for those children and young people who need specific support and consideration of their ongoing special needs into adulthood. The planning for this transition will be actively considered in the care plan and pathway plan leading up to and beyond their 18th birthday to ensure transitional rigour in navigating positive options for a stable home and community life.
- We will continue to monitor outcomes that we know are effective and improve delivery: - immunisations status, the percentage of completed strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ's) which are an indicator in measuring mental health and wellbeing. If they are used to inform plans and practice, GP Registrations, timeliness of dental reviews and timeliness and quality of Health assessments.

How will we know we have been successful?:

- For children and young people in care to be supported to have improving emotional and mental health and wellbeing. To be assured that the SDQ is informing care, education planning and support for our children and young people as per guidance.
- Measure-children and young people's views will be incorporated. To have 100% SDQ completion. We will report on SDQ year on year scores to examine trends and sample a range of children and young people to inform this reporting.
- Initial Health Assessments are continued to be prioritised and evidence of impact upon health planning and impact is available.

- Measure-Data and Quality Assurance Audits monitor the timeliness and impact of Initial and subsequent health assessments.
- Care experienced young people have access to responsive and needs led health services which include physical, mental and emotional health, sexual health and peri, postnatal health support.
- Measure-Data and Quality Assurance Audits evidence increased access and positive impact of health services for care experienced young people.
- To have clear pathways of support available for looked after young people moving to adult services. Themes include Mental Health, Transitional safeguarding and transitions for those young people who do not have a diagnosis and yet will continue to need support from social care (including addictions)
- Measure-Data is developed to monitor current and future needs. Young people aged 14-25 who are leaving care have access to mental health, drug and addiction services when needed. Young people between 14-25 years diagnosed with Autism, ADHD, learning or/and physical disability or specific vulnerabilities are identified and have a clear plan of support that addresses transitional care needs in a timely manner.

Key partners for this strategic priority are:

- Designated Doctor
- Designated Nurse
- Children's Commissioning Lead
- Adult Health Commissioning Lead
- Safeguarding Lead
- Community partners
- Police
- Community safety partners

Governance arrangements

Board members supporting Strategic Priority Themes

Within our Corporate Parenting Strategy, we have set out four priority themes informed by our self and external assessment, children and young people's views and wishes. The Board will arrange four respective subgroups that relate to the priority strategic areas. An elected council member will work closely with an ambassador supported from the participation service and a relevant officer or partner to drive the oversight and challenge to evidence progress and improvement in each area. The lead member will promote the priority within relevant forums, committees, decision making forums and wider council and community events as relevant. The elected member priority lead will receive updates from the operational lead as agreed and prior to reports being presented to the corporate parenting board.

Officers

Officers have a crucial role to play in ensuring that services are developed and delivered to a high standard and that they inform Elected Members of the progress of the plan and any challenges that are being faced. They need to know about the children who are in our care and strive at all times to deliver the highest quality service. They are responsible for advising the Board and ensuring that any agreed actions are implemented as agreed:

- Reporting to the Corporate Parenting Board on performance relating to children in care and care leavers. Three highlight reports of overarching progress for children looked after and Care Experienced per year. Subgroup reporting as agreed with the Chair and Co-Chair.
- Ensuring that the Corporate Parenting Board has all relevant information to ensure that they can provide robust monitoring of services provided to children in care and Care Experienced young people and make decisions based on the most up to date information.

