

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-25

November 2022

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Version control

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1. Foreword

We are passionate in wanting Torbay and its residents to thrive. Central to this vision is making sure that everyone can play their part in supporting Torbay's children and making Torbay 'child friendly'. We are so proud of our children and we are committed to do all we can to support them to benefit from the many opportunities that the Bay has to offer. In all we do, we want our children to feel loved, supported and safe. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our incredibly dedicated foster carers and staff for the commitment they demonstrate to our children every single day.

We are committed to being great corporate parents, to ensure that our children have every opportunity to live happy and fulfilling lives.

Members of the Corporate Parenting Board



Councillor Nick Bye, Cabinet Member for Children's Services



Cllr Hannah Stevens, Deputy Civic Mayor



Cllr Anna Tolchard



Cllr Cordelia Law, Overview and Scrutiny Lead for Children's Services



Cllr Steve Darling, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

2. Corporate Parenting Vision

The Children and Young People's Plan sets out Torbay Council's objectives and priorities for all services which directly affect children and young people across all the communities which make up Torbay. Its overriding objective is ***to ensure that all our children, young people and care experienced young people and adults are safe, happy and healthy in order that they can reach their full potential.***

In the context of Corporate Parenting this objective becomes an ambition ***to ensure that our cared for children and care experienced young people succeed by:***

- Making sure they are safe, happy and healthy in order that they can reach their full potential; and
- Supporting them to have all the opportunities that good parents afford their children.

We are committed to being an effective, caring and ambitious corporate parent and we will show this through:

- our love;
- our focus;
- our language; and
- our actions.

We are loving parents and we care deeply for our children. We will ensure they receive the same standard of care as any good parent would provide. We will protect and support them to cope with the dangers and risks of everyday life. We will celebrate and share in their experiences and achievements, no matter how big or small. We are ambitious for them and will work hard to support them to reach their full potential. We will do everything we can to make sure that our care experienced young people are set up for life.

We want Torbay to be a 'Child Friendly' place. Torbay will be a place that champions our cared for and care experienced children and young people.

3. Introduction

"I would like to be asked for my opinion in decisions"

Cared for young person, Bright Spots Survey

"I think the one thing about being a care leaver is that outside of local services, we tend to be quite a forgotten group. I think people underestimate how hard not having a family is during this time in someone's life."

Care experienced young person, Bright Spots Survey

"It's not enough to ask us what we think and feel, like you are giving us a voice; you need to hear what we say and do something about it."

Cared for young person, specific consultation session



One of our cared for children drew this picture. It sums up how to be the best possible corporate parent to our children and young people. We need to help children and young people to feel safe. We need to create a sense of connection and community. We should support our children and young people to feel loved and nurtured. We need to help them to realise their best possible vision of their future.

So what is corporate parenting?

This is the term used to refer to the responsibilities of the council to provide our cared for and care experienced children and young people with the best possible care and protection. It is about more than just keeping children safe. It is about enhancing every aspect of their lives as far as is possible. We will equip them with the right support to achieve their dreams.

This Corporate Parenting Strategy describes the corporate parent we want to be. It sets out how we will work alongside our partners, including education, police and health services, to achieve our ambition. This requires everyone, from officers to elected Members to GPs to teachers, not only to recognise their role as a corporate parent and to understand how we can work together to be the best possible corporate parents we can be.

This Strategy outlines the commitment of our wider Partnership to the Corporate Parenting objectives and achieving our ambition. We will do this through strong strategic, corporate, and political leadership and meaningful performance management. We commit to:

- ongoing engagement and involvement of children and young people in:
 - implementing our strategy; and
 - Developing and implementing the associated action plans; and
- effective working together with our partners across Torbay.

Our priorities reflect, not only the local and national priorities for cared for children and care experienced young people but also, the priorities which have emerged from our engagement and consultation with children and young people.

Those priorities are underpinned by elected Member support through the Corporate Parenting Strand Leads with the Corporate Parenting Board governance structure. The Strategy demonstrates how we will hold ourselves to account for the delivery of our corporate parenting principles and priorities and the associated action plans.

4. Context

Legal Duties

Under the Children Act 1989, a child is cared for by the Council if they are:

- Provided with accommodation for a continuous period for more than 24 hours,
- Subject to a care order,
- Subject to a placement order.

When a child or young person becomes cared for we become their corporate parent.

In February 2018, the Department for Education published Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities. This outlined the key principles of corporate parenting and the statutory responsibility that all councillors and council officers have in terms of the wellbeing of cared for and care experienced children and young people.

We are also the corporate parent for those young people who are care experienced. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 outlines who qualifies as a care experienced young person. This is a young person aged sixteen or above who has been cared for by the local authority for a relevant period of time since their fourteenth birthday, and for who have been cared for on or after their sixteenth birthday for a period of time.

The expectations in terms of the services and support that local authorities must offer is contained within the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The Council continues to provide support to care experienced young people until they are 25 under the extended duties contained within the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

We want to ensure that, across the Council (including councillors, senior officers and all staff) there is a shared vision, collective responsibility and commitment to our cared for children and care experienced young people. This includes the provision of quality services for them.

5. Principles and Priorities

Corporate Parenting Principles

We will ensure that we meet the needs of our children and young people, and we will use these principles to guide every element of our approach.

We will always:

- act in their best interests and promote their physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- take account of their views, wishes and feelings.
- help them gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by us and our partners.
- promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for them.
- ensure that they are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships, education, and work.
- prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

Priorities

We have identified five priorities to ensure we are the best corporate parents we can be. We will focus on these priorities and continue to talk to children and young people, to make sure they remain the right ones.

Set out below each of the priorities are the relevant Pledges that we have made to our children and young people. The Pledges have been reviewed by The Circle as part of a consultation with young people in care and care experienced adults.

Priority 1: We will work with you

“I’m really lucky to have a great Leaving Care worker...she makes me feel very listened to and supported, which is a really important thing to me. She’s also good at telling me ahead of time when she’s off work or on leave, which helps me because I don’t like sudden changes and not being able to plan in advance.”

Care experienced young person, Bright Spots Survey

“I want to be treated like any other child.”

Cared for child, Bright Spots Survey

“Things are good now that I am older; I make my decisions most of the time”.

Cared for child, Bright Spots Survey

“Don’t be scared to communicate with us, especially when it is about important things like becoming cared for. Be honest with us about what may happen.”

Cared for young person, specific consultation session

"I want to be included in decision so that the outcome is fair. I'd like to be able to be part of all discussion prior to final plans or arrangements."

Cared for child, Bright Spots Survey

- We will come prepared, and we will listen.
- Your views will come first, but we will be honest about what we can do.
- We will explain your rights using language that is easily understood.
- We will use Language that Cares.
- We will respect your privacy and work to ensure that you are not singled out or bullied at school, college, or in any other setting.
- We will use our training to be thoughtful about the challenges you have faced.
- We will celebrate your achievements with you in the ways that you would like.

Priority 2: We will ensure your placement is safe and meets your needs

"Where I live has a warm and welcoming atmosphere. I love it because my foster parents are I think of as mum and dad. I'm safe and secure here."

Care experienced young person, Bright Spots Survey

"I would like to see more of my family."

Cared for child, Bright Spots Survey

"Help us to understand why we have to ask our carers, or our carers have to ask social workers, to do certain things all the time."

Cared for young person, specific consultation session

- We will work with your carers to ensure your home is the best it can be.
- We will work together to keep you safe (safety planning).
- We will work with your carers to ensure that you have opportunities that you enjoy and enable you to have your voice if you want to.
- We will plan visits in advance and involve you in those plans.
- We will help you to stay in contact with any family you may have if you want that and explain the reasons if this is not possible.

Priority 3: We will support you to fulfil your potential

"My Personal Advisor really opened my eyes to the possibilities I am capable of"

Care experienced young person, Bright Spots Survey

“We [need to be] informed fully and clearly about what we should aim to do, what opportunity are there for people in our position and how we can achieve this.”

Care experienced young person, Bright Spots Survey

“Think about what other children may need at the start of a school year and ensure that cared for child have the same opportunities. Try to do this in a way which isn’t us being seen as having ‘extra’ as this makes us feel different.”

Cared for young person, specific consultation session

- We will ask you what your goals are and support you to achieve them.
- We will develop a Personal Education Plan of the things you do in school, so you are helped to do well.
- We will work closely with your school, college or provider and offer you easy to understand reasons for any changes.
- We will encourage and support you to take up opportunities in education, employment and training until the age of at least 21, in ways that suit you.

Priority 4: We will ensure that your physical, emotional, mental health needs are met

“It’s difficult to adjust being independent.”

Care experienced young person, Bright Spots Survey

- We will work together to help to support your sense of well-being and personal identity.
- We will develop a plan to ensure you are healthy and wanting to have good choices called a Personal Health Plan.
- We will support you to access regular health and dental checks and any appointments or treatment you may need – virtually and in person.

Priority 5: You will be supported to develop into an independent, confident and responsible adult

“My Personal Advisor helps me see that what’s happened in the past isn’t my fault. And it’s nice.”

Care experienced young person, Bright Spots Survey

“I’d like more independence”.

“Managing money is really hard especially now I’m living alone for the first time.”

“A better planned transition between being a child and becoming an adult.”

Care experienced young person, Bright Spots Survey

- We will support you to know that challenges and uncertainty are part of life and growth.
- We will ensure you have support and advice, so you are less likely to take certain risks or be open to exploitation by others.
- We will work with you to develop the life skills we all need to achieve our goals and have the best opportunities for the future.

Engaging with children and young people

In respect of all of these priorities and pledges, we will engage and consult with our children and young people, as a way of assuring ourselves that we are abiding by the corporate parenting principles outlined above. We will make sure that we take what we learn from children and young people and embed this in the partnership workforce development and training framework, to make sure that we as corporate parents share this learning.

How non-verbal communication impacts on us

Arriving late without letting us know = “you don’t care about us”

Checking the time frequently = “you don’t want to be here”

Bringing lots of paperwork with you = “you haven’t taken the time to learn about our story”

Making notes or highlighting while we talk = “your paperwork is more important than spending time with us”

Asking lots and lots of questions = “you do not trust what we are telling you”

One consultation session focused on non-verbal communication and what this says to young people; this was then shared as a learning exercise within the Practice Improvement Forum.

TORBAY COUNCIL

Restorative Practice

We are committed to working with children and families in a restorative way. This means we will value and place importance on the relationships we build with children and families. We will always treat children and families with respect and dignity.

For cared for and care experienced young people this means that we will always try to work with you. We won’t make decisions about you without involving you. We won’t do things for you without involving you. We will regularly seek your views and reflect these views in all assessments or plans written with and about you.

Housing

We know that care experienced young people have specific needs when it comes to accommodation. and housing and access to safe, stable and sustainable accommodation is one of our priorities. This is a distinct Strand Lead within our Corporate Parenting Board.

We are working across the Council and with our partners on ways in which we can support care experienced young people to access safe, stable and sustainable accommodation. This was also highlighted to Torbay’s Housing Crisis Review who made the following recommendations:

- to consider paying private landlords more than the standard one-month deposit (normally the equivalent to one month’s rent) to encourage them to rent properties to care experienced young

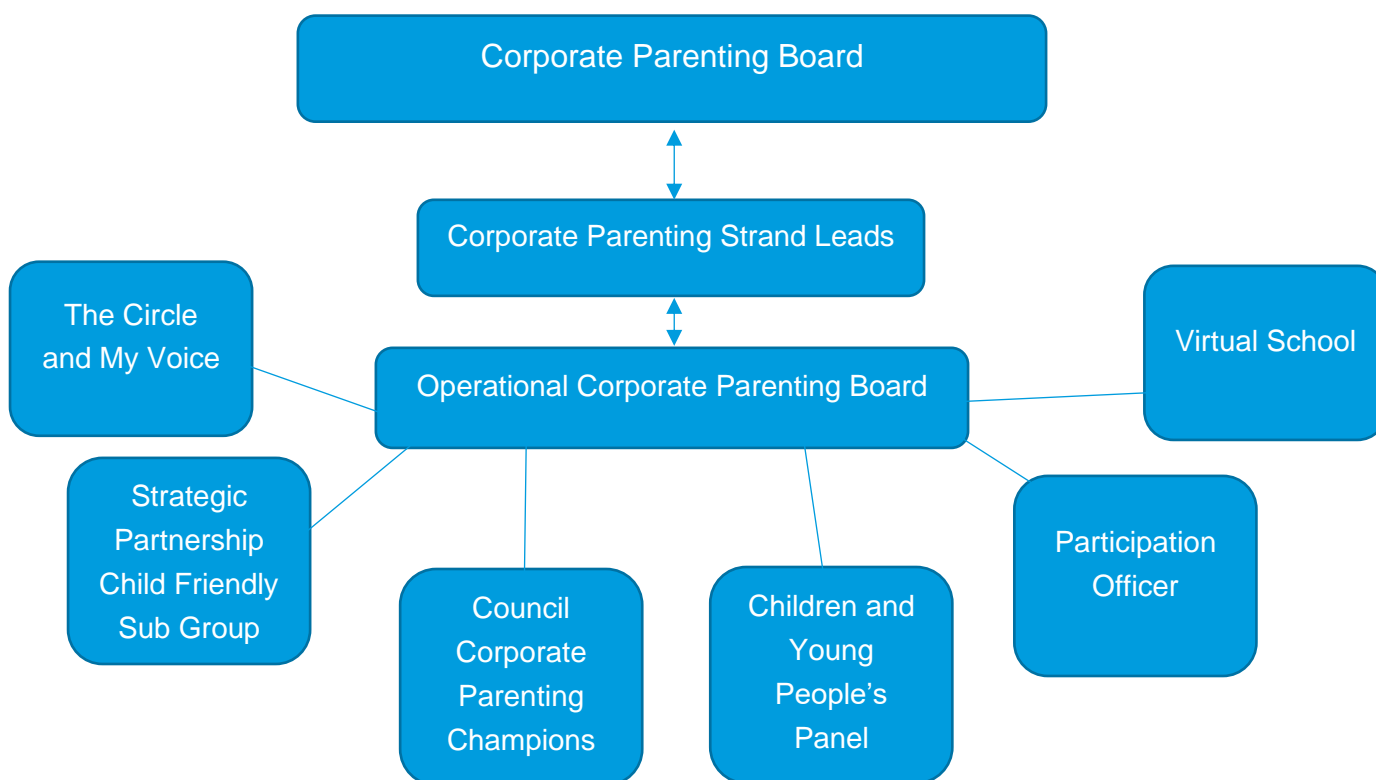
people to give them more confidence they will not be left out of pocket once the young person has moved on (this is something Torbay is already doing).

- to request that provision of new accommodation for care experienced young people should be a priority for TorVista Homes and other registered housing providers.
- to explore options to enable more care experienced young people to remain longer term with their foster carers (and we have revised our Staying Put policy, in conjunction with fostering families and care experienced young people as a way of doing this).
- to explore options for Banding in Devon Home Choice to see if care experienced young people can be given a higher priority and what processes are in place.
- to request that officers look at good practice from other local authorities when refreshing the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to see how we can encourage the development of more larger family homes, single units, units for care experienced young people or units to assist adults with a disability to live independently.

6. Governance

The Council's Community and Corporate Plan sets out our aspirations for the community of Torbay including children and young people. The Council's objective is to ensure that all children and young people are safe, happy and healthy in order that they can reach their full potential.

Whilst corporate parenting is the responsibility of the Council as a whole and of its partners, on a day-to-day basis our arrangements are set out below.



Corporate Parenting Board

This Board is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Children and comprises of a wider group of councillors drawn from all political groups together with partner representatives and senior officers from Children's Services.

The Board meets every two months and forms a key element within the Council's Constitution. It provides a forum for regular, detailed discussion of issues and a positive link with our cared for and care experienced children and young people.

An Operational Corporate Parenting Board has also been established, which is chaired by the Chief Executive. The Operational Corporate Parenting Board provides an operational oversight of all of the corporate parenting activities being undertaken. It puts into action the decisions of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Corporate Parenting Strand Leads

In line with the priorities outlined above, we have established five Corporate Parenting Strand Leads: education; fostering and employment; housing; mental health and wellbeing; and participation. Each Strand Lead is led by a councillor who is also a member of the Corporate Parenting Board. Each Strand Lead has their own job description. Each Strand Leads meets with their Lead Officer and other key officers and partner representatives. Strand Leads take the strategic direction from the Corporate Parenting Board for their area of focus and scrutinises and explores relevant performance data and information. This then feeds into the action plans which sit under the Operational Corporate Parenting Board.

In addition, there are two identified underpinning Strands: The Council Corporate Parenting Champions (see below); and preparing for and transition to adulthood.

Virtual School

Torbay Virtual School provides the framework to meet the educational needs of our cared for children. It works working closely with educational providers, carers, social care and health practitioners, and children and young people. The work of the Virtual School is overseen by a Governing Body and led by the Virtual School Headteacher.

Educational attainment and progress for our children is subject to regular review to determine the effectiveness of the arrangements put in place for them via their Personal Education Plan. The Virtual School produce an annual report for the consideration of the Governing Body and Corporate Parenting Board. The annual report is also presented at a meeting of the Council.

The Circle and My Voice

The Circle and My Voice are participation groups facilitated by two Participation Officers who are part of Torbay's Learning Academy. The Circle is our Cared for Council and Community and brings together some of our cared for children to take part in activities on a regular basis and to obtain their views on the effectiveness of our arrangements for them. Similarly, My Voice is a participation group of care experienced young people, who meet regularly and who are actively involved in our Corporate Parenting Board and wider consultation about their care experienced journey. Their views have been instrumental in developing Torbay's Pledge for our cared for children.

Council Corporate Parenting Champions

All departments across the Council and our wholly owned companies will have designated officers as Corporate Parenting Champions. The Champions come together on a quarterly basis to help to shape their department's role in ensuring that we are good corporate parents and to contribute to Council-wide initiatives to enhance our Corporate Parenting Offer.

The established aims of this group are:

- To become an authority who thinks first about our corporate parent role and fully embedded in all we do as an authority.

- To provide a corporate parent offer for our children on top of the care plan in place.
- To provide a corporate parenting offer for foster families.
- To raise awareness of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities.

Strategic Partnership Child Friendly Subgroup

Our Strategic Partnership has a subgroup which is focussed upon how organisations and communities come together collectively to become Child Friendly and support our cared for and care experienced children and young people.

Children and Young People's Panel

Torbay is in the process of establishing a Children and Young People's Panel, which will consist of a diverse group of young people that can represent all the children within Torbay. This will include but not be limited to representatives from different educational providers, children and young people with SEND, cared for children and cared experienced young people. This would be a means of bringing together the existing participation groups, as a way of centralising feedback from children and young people. It would also support us in being able to expand the representation within these groups and reflect the voice of a wider range of children and young people.

In addition, this will create a sense of community and collaboration for our young people as they unite to advocate for themselves and have their voice heard.

Participation Officer

Torbay introduced the role of Participation Officer in June 2022. The main aim of this role is to support and promote positive participation with children, young people and parent/carers. The role of the Participation Officer is integral to overseeing and co-ordinating the ways in which we seek and learn from feedback from children and young people, including those who are cared for or who have care experience.

7. Talk to us

Feedback from children and young people is really important to us.

We would like to hear from children and young people and your view about how well we are keeping our promises to you. We take your experiences of care and leaving care really seriously. You can tell us about something positive or something which has been more difficult for you.

We want to learn from your experiences. We want to make sure that the support and services we provide to you continues to improve based on what you tell us.

If you think that we are not keeping our pledges to you, we would really like to hear this from you. If you think the pledges should change, tell us.

The best thing to do if you would like to share your experiences is to first speak to someone you trust. This could be your social worker, Personal Advisor, carer, teacher, support worker or your Independent Reviewing Officer.

If this does not help you to solve your problem, or if you would like to speak to senior leaders who work in Children's Services, email placements@torbay.gov.uk They will make sure that the right person is able to contact you within 48 hours to talk about this further.

(We are working on a different name for this email address. We are busy speaking to our young people so that they can help us decide what to call it. We also want to know how they would want this to work, so watch this space!)