



for Care-Experienced  
Children and Young People

# BECOME.

THE CHARITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE  
AND YOUNG CARE LEAVERS

## **Inquiry on extending corporate parenting responsibilities across the public sector**

### **Executive summary**

March 2024

This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either House or its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of Members of both Houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in this report are those of the group. This report and inquiry was researched and funded by Become, the national charity for children in care and young care leavers, which provides the secretariat for the APPG.

## Introduction

There is currently not a level playing field for care-experienced children and young people. Children in care have often faced high levels of adversity, complexity and trauma before entering the care system and this can be compounded by the instability that they experience whilst in care. When leaving the care system, young people can face a care cliff: expected to become independent overnight, often well before they are ready and with no safety net or support network to fall back on.

Care-experienced children and young people currently have contact with a broad range of public services, which can range from health, education and transport services to the welfare, criminal justice and immigration systems. Public services can provide crucial support, but this can also be inconsistent, inadequate or even at times harmful. We have heard how public services and professionals can be stigmatising, or inflexible; how care-experienced young people can face barriers to accessing services, or can fall through the cracks between different services; and how some services are not adequately equipped to identify or respond to their needs.

Care-experienced young people continue to experience disproportionately poor outcomes across a range of areas. This has a significant human cost, impacting on their lives and life chances; as well as a significant financial cost.

There is a real need for concerted action to improve support for care-experienced children and young people across society to enable them to have happy and healthy lives, and to be able to fulfil their potential and aspirations. As this report will show, whilst their role is critical, this should not be solely the responsibility of local authorities—

**we all have a role to play.**

**“A collaborative approach with other organisations rather than just the council is really important because it does take a village raise a child.”**

**Care-experienced young person**

## Our Inquiry

Under current legislation, local authorities in England are required to have regard to corporate parenting principles, which are a set of high-level aspirations such as to act in the best interests of care-experienced children and young people, promote their health and wellbeing, and to listen to their wishes and preferences.

In its *Stable Homes, Built on Love* strategy, published last year, the Government committed to strengthen and extend corporate parenting responsibilities across the public sector, accepting a recommendation from the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care and building on reforms in Scotland where 26 different types of public body are currently named as corporate parents.

As the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Care-Experienced Children and Young People, we think these reforms have the potential to positively transform the scaffolding of support around care-experienced young people. We want these reforms to be ambitious, robust and deliver concrete change to improve the lives and life chances of care-experienced children and young people. Most importantly, we want the views, insights and experiences of care-experienced young people to be at the heart of these reforms.

Over the past six months Become, as the secretariat to the APPG, have supported us to carry out an inquiry to gather and collate the views of care-experienced children and young people, organisations and professionals about these reforms. In total, we have heard from over 200 people and organisations, including 160 care-experienced children and young people. This report sets out our main findings and recommendations for the effective development and implementation of reforms to corporate parenting.

### Corporate parenting tree:



Throughout our inquiry, we have heard numerous examples of how care-experienced children and young people have been or felt let down by public services and professionals. Young people have reported facing stigma from professionals, such as police officers, teachers and health professionals, on the basis of prejudicial negative stereotypes of children who have been in care. Others have highlighted the specific barriers that they have faced in accessing services or support, or how they have fallen through the cracks between services, such as university students being left without anywhere to live outside of term-time. Public services are often not adequately trauma-informed; and young people have reported that interactions with professionals, systems and services have negatively impacted on their wellbeing.

On the other hand, we have heard brilliant examples of public services providing vital support or taking targeted action to identify or respond to the views and needs of care-experienced young people. This includes surveying care-experienced young people about how services could be improved for them, providing ring-fenced training and employment opportunities to address under-representation in certain professions, involving them on recruitment panels for key roles, and the promotion of resources to upskill professionals' awareness and understanding about the impact of being care-experienced.

When organisations proactively or strategically consider how they can adapt their services or policies to better meet the needs of care-experienced young people, this can lead to a real improvement in young people's opportunities, experiences and outcomes. Throughout our inquiry, we have found widespread support for strengthening corporate parenting responsibilities and extending these to a broad range of public sector organisations.

Care-experienced young people want to see a range of public organisations being better equipped to provide support that works for them. They want to see corporate parenting responsibilities being threaded through the values, ethos and fabric of organisations: with professionals having a better understanding of care-experience; targeted offers of support; and the views and insights of care-experienced young people being at the heart of service development and improvement. Most of all, young people have told us that they want corporate parenting responsibilities to be taken seriously and deliver real positive change, not seen as tokenistic or a tick box exercise. Being a corporate parent should be seen as a privileged responsibility and organisations should be held to account for the extent to which they are fulfilling their responsibilities as a corporate parent.

## We recommend that:

1. The Government legislates to introduce a new set of more action-focused corporate parenting responsibilities, with a stronger legal weighting, to replace the existing corporate parenting principles.
2. The Department for Education develops and publishes statutory guidance setting out the requirements for new corporate parenting organisations and ways in which these can be fulfilled, the support available to them, how they will be held to account, and examples of best practice.
3. The Government legislates to confer corporate parenting responsibilities onto a broad range of public sector bodies and organisations.
4. The Secretary of State for Education be given the power to confer corporate parenting responsibilities onto other public sector organisations in the future, in line with agreed criteria.
5. The Department for Education appoints and funds an independent organisation to provide training, advice, guidance and support to corporate parenting organisations to enable them to effectively fulfil their responsibilities and promote best practice.
6. Corporate parenting organisations be required to develop and publish corporate parenting plans every three years, and progress reports annually, and submit these to their relevant Government Department.
  - a) Corporate parenting plans should set out SMART objectives for how organisations will fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities over this period, an action plan for delivery and how plans have been informed by the views of care-experienced young people.
7. The Department for Education oversee and enforce the failure of any corporate parenting organisations to submit corporate parenting plans or progress reports using a range of enforcement measures.
8. The Government be required to develop and publish a cross-Government corporate parenting plan every three years, co-ordinated by the Department for Education, which brings together strategic objectives and plans from across Government Departments; as well as publishing an annual progress report.
  - a) The Secretary of State for Education should be required to make an annual statement to Parliament upon publication of the progress report to enable Parliamentary scrutiny of the Government's plans and progress.

**“‘Would this be appropriate for my own child?’ should be the litmus test. It is about making decisions in our best interests.”**

**Care-experienced young person, aged 21, the Midlands**

9. An independent body such as the Children’s Commissioner’s Office be funded to develop and publish a shadow corporate parenting report every three years based on consultation with care-experienced young people about progress to date and areas for improvement.
10. Relevant regulators, inspectorates and ombuds-organisations ensure that assessments of how well corporate parenting organisations are complying with corporate parenting responsibilities are adequately reflected in relevant regulatory frameworks.
11. An independent body such as the Children’s Commissioner’s Office be given additional powers to hold corporate parents to account, including powers to:
  - a) receive complaints about flagrant or systemic breaches of corporate parenting responsibilities;
  - b) compel information from corporate parenting organisations as part of investigations into complaints;
- c) write to a corporate parenting organisation setting out remedial action that they must take to ensure compliance with corporate parenting responsibilities; and
- d) undertake enforcement action or penalties if requested remedial action is not taken.
12. The Department for Education consult further with care-experienced children and young people about renaming ‘corporate parenting’ and potential alternative options.
13. The Government funds and implements a workforce development programme to upskill frontline professionals who work with care-experienced children and young people, including building their understanding of the impact of childhood trauma.
14. The Government improves and increases the collection of data relating to children and young people’s outcomes, which is disaggregated by care experience.





## Box A: Proposed corporate parenting responsibilities

It is the duty of every corporate parent, in so far as consistent with the proper exercise of its other functions:

1. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health, well-being and safety, of care-experienced children and young people;
2. to proactively identify and respond to the views, wishes and feelings of care-experienced children and young people, including about service improvement;
3. to assess the needs of care-experienced children and young people for services and support it provides, and any barriers, stigma or discrimination they may face;
4. to take a trauma-informed approach, and to adapt or introduce policies, services or opportunities to meet the needs of care-experienced children and young people and address any barriers, stigma or discrimination they face;
5. to promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for care-experienced children and young people, and prepare them for adulthood;
6. to promote, protect and fulfil the full rights of care-experienced children and young people, including those contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
7. to act in ways that promote and protect the stability and security of care-experienced children and young people in their home lives, relationships, education, employment or finances;
8. to take such other action as it considers appropriate for the purposes of improving the way in which it exercises its functions in relation to care-experienced children and young people.

## Box B: List of public sector organisations that we recommend are appointed as corporate parents under new legislation

1. All tier-one local authorities in England and district councils
2. Metro Mayors
3. Department for Health and Social Care, NHS England, the Care Quality Commission, all Integrated Care Boards, and all NHS Trusts (including Foundation Trusts, Mental Health Trusts, Ambulance Service Trusts and others)
4. Department for Education, Ofsted, the Office for Students, schools (including maintained schools, academies, free schools and alternative provision), further education providers, and higher education institutes and providers
5. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and housing associations
6. Department for Work and Pensions, and Job Centre Plus
7. Ministry of Justice, police forces, Youth Justice Board, His Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service, and Police and Crime Commissioners
8. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Arts Council, and Sport England
9. Department for Transport and regional transport authorities
10. The Home Office
11. His Majesty's Treasury, and the Cabinet Office