

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education & Children's Services Committee
DATE	29 April 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Corporate Parenting Annual Report
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/25/083
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR	Graeme Simpson
TERMS OF REFERENCE	2.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Committee with an overview of Corporate Parenting activity not reported previously and present a High Level Promise Plan which takes account of expectations within Plan 24-30 and reflects the voices of our care experienced children and young people.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee:

- 2.1 Note the findings of the Bright Spots Report (October 2024);
- 2.2 Approve the High Level Promise Plan in Appendix A; and
- 2.3 Instruct the Chief Social Work Officer to update Committee on progress against the High Level Promise Plan within one calendar year.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 named specific public bodies as "corporate parents". Each has a range of responsibilities to care experienced children and young people, some more than others. Effectively, they form the "corporate family", and all of them need to fulfil their responsibilities if children and young people are to get the support they need from across the system. Specially the act notes the following six duties:

- To be alert to matters which, or which might, adversely affect the wellbeing of looked after children and young people and care leavers,
- To assess the needs of care experienced children and young people for services and support provided,
- To promote the interests of care experienced children and young people,
- To provide opportunities for care experienced children and young people to participate in activities designed to promote their wellbeing,

- To make sure care experienced children and young people can access opportunities and make use of services and support,
 - To strive to improve the way our organisation functions in relation to care experienced children and young people.
- 3.2. Our Corporate Parenting responsibilities are reflected in our Local Outcome Improvement Plan (2019-2026), Stretch Outcome 5 *“By meeting the health and emotional wellbeing needs of our care experienced young people they will have the same levels of attainment in education and positive destinations as their peers by 2026”*.
- 3.3 Considerable work has been undertaken to align Plans for children and young people, where possible, to the Children’s Services Plan. This alignment is helping to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of different groups, including those we have Corporate Parenting responsibilities for. As a result of this alignment, our Corporate Parenting Plan and work towards delivery of The Promise has been driven and reported through the Children’s Services Board.
- 3.4 The current Children’s Services Plan runs to 2026 and work will soon commence on the next iteration of that statutory Plan. Given that the needs of children are inextricably linked to the needs of their parents and carers, the development of the next Children’s Services Plan will be fully aligned to the development of the next Local Outcome Improvement Plan. This alignment will help us take the preventative whole family approach described in Plan 24-30.

Plan 24-30

- 3.5 In June 2024 the Promise Scotland team started to publish [Plan 24-30](#). Over the last few months the website has been populated with details of the proposed route map for Scotland to fulfil its commitment to deliver the Promise by 2030.
- 3.6 Plan 24 – 30 builds on the progress made through Plan 21 – 24. Aberdeen City’s significant progress to delivering on Plan 21 – 24 was last reported to Committee in November 2024 ([F&C/24/337](#)).
- 3.7 Plan 24 – 30 retains a focus on the 5 Foundations of **Voice, Family, Care, People and Scaffolding**. It reinforces that change must be rights led, trauma informed and underpinned by the Getting it Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) policy.
- 3.8 For each of the Foundations, Plan 24 – 30 provides a series of high level changes to be achieved by 2030. In some cases the cultural shift is required across multiple Corporate Parents, in others the change sits predominantly with one, and in a few cases the change may require a significant change through for example legislation to be progressed. Plan 24-30 acknowledges the complex nature of much of the required change and the multiple interdependencies, including the need for legislative change, and as a result Plan 24—30 will be regularly updated.
- 3.9 Having articulated the change required to deliver each of the Foundations, Plan 24 – 30 breaks down the responsibilities of individual Corporate Parents to deliver the change, reinforcing that it is everyone’s responsibility to deliver the

Promise. While helpful it continues to be recognised that to deliver the noted changes will require Corporate Parents to work collaboratively with each other and with care experienced young people. The changes outlined in Plan 24-30 take account of a range of documentation recently published.

Promise Progress Framework

- 3.10 In December 2024 The Scottish Government, Promise Scotland and COSLA published the [Promise Progress Framework](#). This framework will provide a national reporting mechanism to more effectively and consistently demonstrate the extent to which Scotland is keeping the Promise. The first National report will be published at the end of 2025.
- 3.11 It is anticipated that the Framework will be an iterative reporting tool. This recognises that reporting requirements are likely to change over the next five years but also that we need to move beyond qualitative data to explore how the 'stories' of children, young people and families can further demonstrate how The Promise is being delivered.
- 3.12 The Children's Services Board has agreed to adopt the Promise Progress Framework as its reporting tool. This will ensure a level of benchmarking can be undertaken with the national position as well as identifying areas where increased level of change and improvement activity is required. Initial data collection has been included in the Children's Services Board Annual Report also being considered by Committee, and over time it is thought that this will allow a level of benchmarking.

Promise Oversight Board Year 3 Report

- 3.13 In February 2025 The Promise Oversight Board published their 3rd [report](#). This sets out their evaluation as to the extent to which Scotland is delivering on the intentions of the Independent Care Review and The Promise. The timing of this report marked the halfway point by which The Promise must be kept. It was the assessment of the Oversight Board that Scotland is not halfway towards keeping its promise.
- 3.14 The Oversight Board's report highlighted two 'Priority Areas' that nationally need to be given more attention, Whole Family Support (which will be supported locally through both our Future Libraries Model and Fairer Futures Partnership with Scottish Government, and Supporting the Workforce (which has been supported through the establishment of the Children's Social Work Workforce Development Plan presented to Committee in November '2024).
- 3.15 Whilst acknowledging the impact of unexpected events since the publication of the Independent Care Review in 2020, the Oversight Board remain clear that Scotland is heading in the right direction but that pace needs to increase and that all Corporate Parents must play their active part. The Oversight Board highlighted their view that some leaders do not see how delivering for care experienced young people not only improves the lives of their families and communities, but society as a whole.

Scrutiny, Assurance and Legislation

- 3.16 In November 2024 the Care Inspectorate published a Thematic Inspection Report in relation to Care Experienced Young People's [Transition from care](#). The report acknowledges that the findings of the Thematic Review are not new. This Thematic Report mirrors the findings of The Promise Scotland's [100 days of Listening Report](#).

The Thematic report identified 8 areas of 'Consideration for Future Practice'. In examining these there was clear and strong alignment to the responses from our own care leavers who contributed to Aberdeen City's Bright Spots activity (see below). The findings also have alignment to Aberdeen City's participation in the Royal Foundation Homewards programme aimed at eradicating homelessness.

- 3.17 The Scottish Government have begun to consult on the delivery of a Promise Bill. This piece of legislation is anticipated to be wide ranging and will consider aspects of the Independent Care Review that require legislative change. This will include but is not limited to:

- Reform of the Children's Hearing System
- Furthering the needs of care leavers, including the provision of life long advocacy
- Defining the term 'care experienced'
- Changes to support the recruitment and retention of foster carers

- 3.18 The timeline for the proposed Promise Bill is currently uncertain, but legislative change in itself will not deliver the cultural and transformative change required if Scotland is to truly deliver on its commitment to keep the promise by 2030.

Additional Corporate Parenting Activity

- 3.19 [The Loop](#) tells the story of our Corporate Parenting Activity over the course of 2024 with the audience being those we have Corporate Parenting responsibility for. Feedback from our young people has been exceptionally positive. It will be critical that we continue to share with our care experienced community, the progress Corporate Parents make addressing the areas they highlighted could be better. We now plan to enable young people to contribute to its future development and design.

- 3.20 The Loop highlights our focus has been on participation and central to this was our engagement with the Bright Spots programme. The Bright Spots programme is a research project that helps local authority areas to use children and young people's voices to inform service development and strategic thinking.

A Changing Inspection Regime

- 3.21 Aberdeen City's last strategic inspection of Children Services was in 2019. It is anticipated that Aberdeen City will again be the subject of a strategic inspection in the coming 12 – 24 months. In January 2025, the Care Inspectorate announced their intention to shift the focus of strategic inspections. Going forward these will focus on:

- children in the 'care system' living at home with their parents or who have recently been subject to compulsory supervision orders with a condition to remain at home,
- the impact of services and the difference made
- taking account of The Promise and incorporation of children's rights

3.22 It will therefore be incumbent on all local Corporate Parents to ensure a renewed commitment to improving the outcomes of care experienced young people and give full effect to their voices as articulated in the Bright Spots Report.

Bright Spots Programme

3.23 At the start of 2024 Aberdeen City's Children and Family Support services sought to understand what life was like for Aberdeen's care experienced children and young people. We asked all 'looked after children' aged 4 – 17 and all care leavers aged 16 – 26 to complete an online survey called Bright Spots. There was an exceptionally high response rate of circa 70% from our young people (the highest percentage of all local authority areas in Scotland). This amounted to over 400 young people sharing their views. The analysis of the survey responses was undertaken by CELCIS (Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection). Their findings were shared with the local authority in Autumn 2024 with a multi-agency presentation to the City's Corporate Parents in November 2024.

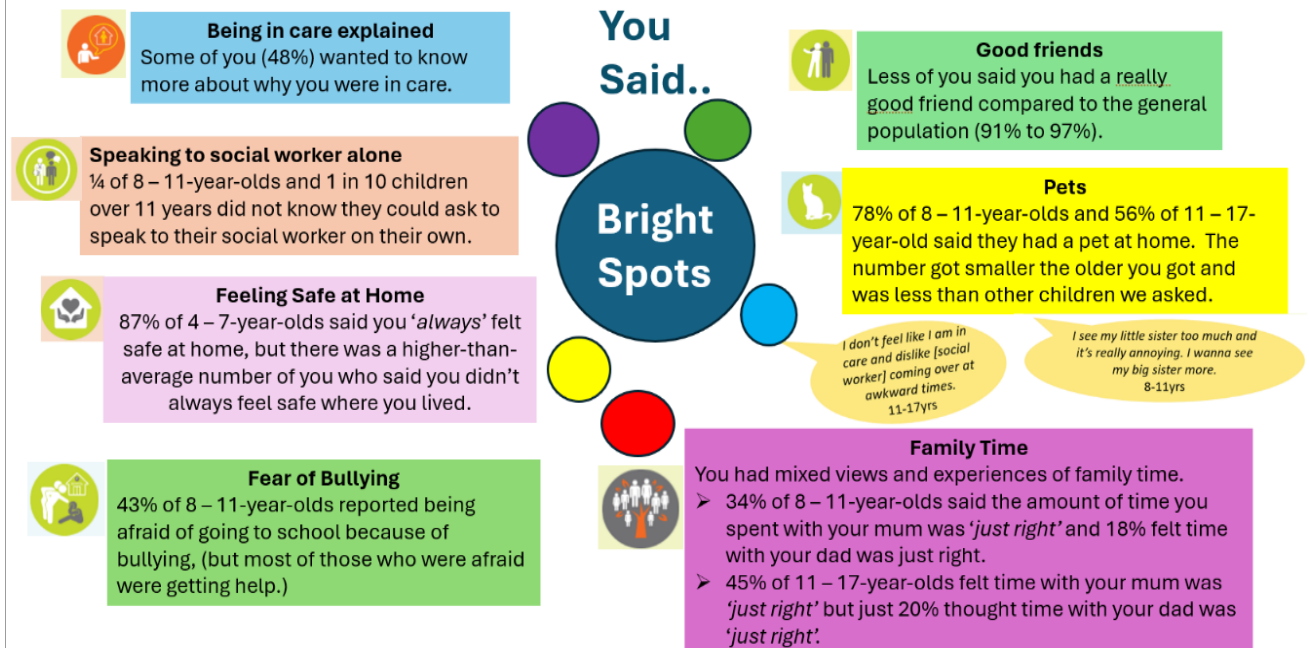
3.24 The responses from Aberdeen City's children and young people were benchmarked against other local authority areas from across the UK who have participated in the Bright Spots programme. The analysis allowed for "Bright Spots" to highlight the support provided by Corporate Parents to Aberdeen City's children and young people as well as areas where support "could be better".

3.25 The key findings from the **Your Life our Care** survey for 4 – 17 year olds who are looked after were:

What is working well for children in care aged 4 – 17 in Aberdeen City?



What could be better for children 4 – 17 years in care in Aberdeen City?

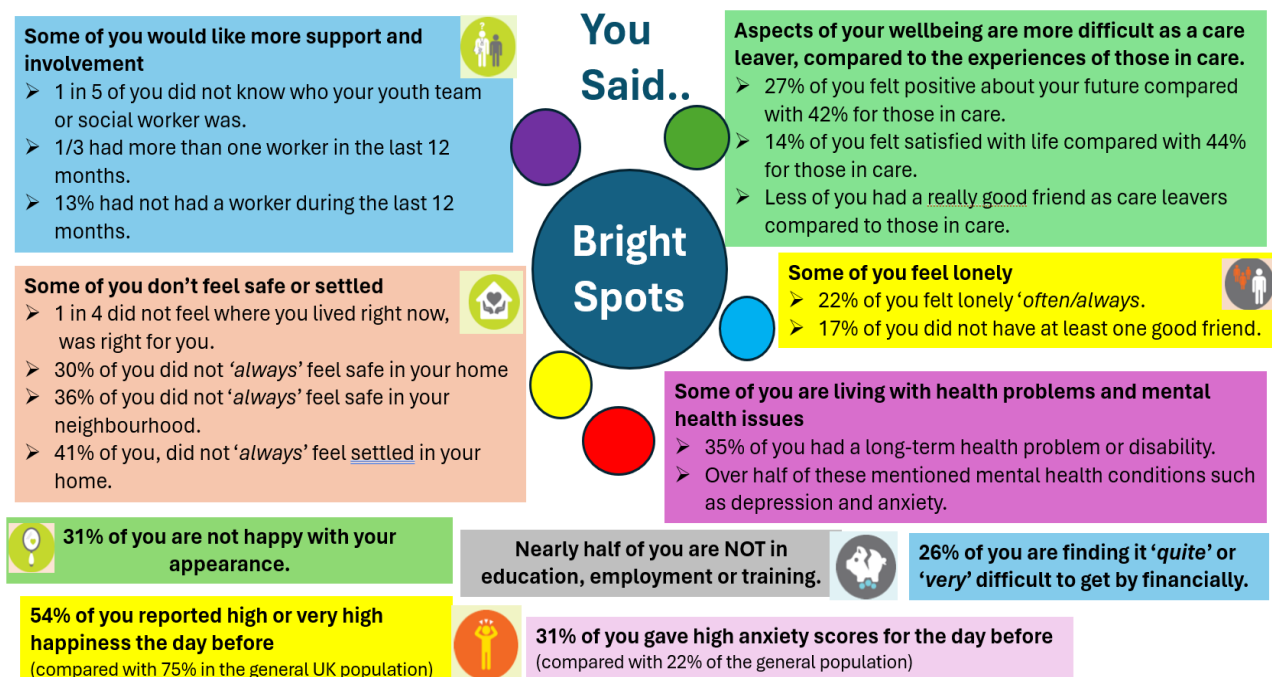


3.26 The key findings from the **Your Life beyond Care** survey for 4 – 17 year olds who are looked after were:

What is working well for care leavers in Aberdeen?



What could be better for care leavers in Aberdeen?



- 3.27 The CELCIS analysis culminated in four recommendations for Corporate Parents:
- I. Increased planning, activity and measurement of activity relating to infants and children particularly under 5's.
 - II. Increased recognition, understanding and attention to diversity between children and young people with planning and activities.
 - III. Increased collaboration between corporate parents to:
 - a. Increase knowledge and understanding of responsibilities
 - b. Maximise opportunities/resources for children and young people.
 - IV. Greater involvement from health boards and special NHS Boards in their role as corporate parents.
- 3.28 Given the depth of learning that the Bright Spots programme has enabled, multi-agency partners have agreed that the findings from this will form the basis of our Corporate Parenting improvement activity over the coming years and be incorporated into the Children's Services Board Plan from 2026. This learning has also been added to our High Level Promise Plan in Appendix A.

The High Level Promise Plan

- 3.29 Unsurprisingly, some areas of change outlined in our High Level Promise Plan are relatively straight forward with systems and practice already in place to reflect the commitment made in The Promise. These areas require to be maintained and ownership of the maintenance is detailed. Others however are more complex and will require a series of iterative changes to be made. In almost all cases a programme of work is already in place to address this complexity, and the progress of these programmes of work will require to be routinely monitored against the commitments made in Plan 24-30..
- 3.30 As outlined earlier, The Promise cannot be kept by a single service or organisation, it will only be delivered by all of those with Corporate Parenting responsibilities working together. As a result, multi-agency work to deliver The Promise will continue to be coordinated by the Children's Services Board, the Child Protection Committee and other multi-agency governance structures.
- 3.31 From a Local Authority perspective, The High Level Promise Plan evidences how the Promise will not be kept by a single Cluster alone, with actions from Children's Social Work, Education and Life Long Learning, Housing and others required. As an organisation each Cluster benefits from close working with others. In order to ensure sufficient focus on how our own Local Authority actions are helping to keep The Promise, and ensuring that we give sufficient time to exploiting the benefits of our relatively new organisational structure on this vulnerable group, an Internal Promise Board will be established the actions that require to be driven by Aberdeen City Council.
- 3.32 All specific actions have been drawn into a single High Level Promise Plan. (Appendix A) and a RAG rating has been applied to give Members a sense of our progress against each commitment. A green RAG rating suggests that the standard exemplified is already in place and requires to be maintained and the owner identified to maintain that work is detailed. Where work is already progressing (amber) this has been referenced to ensure that Members have an

understanding of how work already in train will support delivery of The Promise. Areas in red will need to commence and those in grey do not require any immediate response from the Local Authority. Time has also been taken to check that the next steps identified through our Bright Spots survey are set out within our Plan.

3.33 With Committee approval, this plan will now be presented to the Children's Services Board so that additional Corporate Parents can add their contributions to enable the Children's Services Board to have full oversight of progress and an Internal Board will be established to monitor Local Authority progress.

3.34 It is proposed that Committee receives a yearly update on progress towards delivery of The Promise.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1. The Corporate Parenting duties included in Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 are designed to ensure that the attention and resources of various organisations are explicitly focussed on the task of safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of looked after children and young people, and care leavers. This part extends the duties of corporate parents and the reporting responsibilities of local authorities.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. Risk

7.1 The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council's Risk Appetite Statement.

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*taking into account controls/control actions</small>	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Many of the requirements of Plan 24 – 30 are already built into a variety of strategic plans. It is expected that gaps will emerge as the legislation and policy intentions become	The Children's Services Board and Community Planning Management Group have oversight of the delivery of the relevant	M	Yes

	clearer. As such our planning will continue to be iterative.	strategic plans in this respect.		
Compliance	The Council has responsibility to comply with its statutory corporate parenting responsibilities.	The Children's Services Board and the Corporate Parenting Group has responsibility for the Corporate Parenting Improvement Activity. This has increasingly been incorporated into the Children's Services Plan.	L	Yes
Operational	Care experienced children and young people are a vulnerable cohort whose needs require to be recognised and met. Competing resources demands may have an impact	These are duties that are incorporated into existing structures and will be consolidated into practice.	L	Yes
Financial	No significant risks identified		N/A	Yes
Reputational	A failure of Aberdeen City Council to comply and meet its Corporate Parenting responsibilities would reflect negatively on the Council.	The Council and partners are committed to keeping The Promise and implementing Plan 24-30.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No significant risks identified		N/A	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	<p>Plan 24-30 has direct relevance to the delivery of the following policy statements contained within the Council Delivery Plan for People:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the Council follows best practice as a corporate parent to get the best outcomes for looked-after young people, those in kinship care and those with additional support needs such as autism, developmental disorders or mental health problems. • Continue to seek to support young people to receive care in Aberdeen, through fostering, adoption and other services and seek to reduce "out of authority" placements. • Work with the city's universities, North East Scotland College and businesses to increase educational and training options and the number of care experienced young people and young people from deprived communities, going onto positive destinations, including further and higher education, vocational training and apprenticeships
Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	Plan 24-30 has direct relevance to the following stretch outcomes in the LOIP and will help support delivery of these:

	<p>3. 95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their 27-30 month review by 2026.</p> <p>4. 90% of children and young people report they feel listened to all the time by 2026.</p> <p>5. By meeting the health and emotional wellbeing needs of care experienced children and young people they will have the same levels of attainment in education and positive destinations as their peers by 2026</p>
Regional and City Strategies	Plan 24-30 is relevant to Aberdeen City Council's Delivery Plan, the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, the Children's Services Plan and the Corporate Parenting Plan.
UK and Scottish Legislative and Policy Programmes	<p>Ensuring the effective planning for children and young people is central to the planning for all children and young people open to Children's Social Work.</p> <p>Implementation of Incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots Law; The Children (Care & Justice) Act and the impending "Promise Bill" (which will incorporate legislation in relation to the Children's Hearing system) are all relevant to our collective commitment to #KeepthePromise.</p> <p>This wide ranging and ambitious programme impacts on a range of statutory duties on the Council in relation to vulnerable and care experienced children including those contained in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011, Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 and - Children (Scotland) Act 2020.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	It is confirmed that no Integrated Impact Assessment is required.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.
Other	Not required.

10. APPENDICES

10.1 Appendix A – High Level Promise Plan

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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