

2024

**Bristol's Corporate Parenting Strategy:
summary of children, young people, carers
and workforce consultations**

Bristol City Council

March 2024

Section 1 – Children and Young People

Introduction:

This section summarises children and young people’s feedback from the following sources:

- Bristol’s Annual Children in care survey results 2023
- Advocacy and Independent Visiting feedback 2023
- Feedback from focus groups with Bristol’s children in care and care leaver participation groups
- [Coram Voice: response to the Care Review](#)
- Top 10 Priorities for Care Leavers developed by [National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum](#)
- Consultation on priorities for new Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Care Leaver survey for shadow board
- IRO survey
- Top 10 Asks – Young People’s Benchmarking Forum
- Bristol’s SEND consultation

The most recent consultation went out to Bristol’s children in care and care leavers to review the suggested priorities, building blocks and values for the Corporate Parenting Strategy. Responses came from 34 care-experienced children and young people via three different surveys depending on age and/or access needs. We specifically focussed on hearing from children living out of Bristol, and minoritised communities to ensure we gained views across a range of care experience, including any intersectionality our children experience. Additional feedback from other relevant sources has also been collated into this document. The feedback is set out thematically.

1. Homes and Housing

100% of children and young people who answered the corporate parenting consultation survey chose safe and loving homes as one of their top three priorities. Not having to move and being given appropriate support on leaving care were cited as particularly important to children and young people. Children additionally cited importance of carers being well trained and supported.

The majority of children and young people say they trust the adults they live with but this decreases with age. The option to live with a pet is consistently cited by children and young people both locally and nationally as important to them.

"I get to live with my pet which is awesome because she has one eye and gives the best snuggles. She makes me happy when I'm upset."

"Feeling safe and settled where you live is so important."

"I was 16 living in supported accommodation – I definitely did not feel safe."

2. Health and Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing was chosen as a top three priority by care-experienced young people, and in the children in care survey. Timely access to appropriate services for mental and physical health, including dental health, continues to be a top priority for care-experienced young people in Bristol, and reflects the national picture.

. In an additional survey for care leavers in 2023, ensuring young people can receive therapeutic support in a timely way and is accessible for when they need was chosen as one of their top three priority areas.

Girls in care and LGBTQ+ young people in care reported low confidence in how they look in the Annual Children in Care Survey 2023.

Coram Voice's response to the Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy consultation (2023) states that 'urgent action is needed to ensure that young people can access mental health support when and where they need it. Young people have told us this is their number 1 priority'.

"We need help to manage big emotions."

"Counselling for children in care is needed."

"We want someone to talk to about our problems."

3. Safeguarding

One of the focus groups with care-experienced young people chose safeguarding as their number one priority, specifically mentioning children going missing and not feeling safe where they live.

The annual children in care survey for showed that most children trust their social worker but this decreases with age.

"I was 16 living in supported accommodation – I definitely did not feel safe."

"So many care leavers I know have got no idea about safe relationships."

"We need help with healthy relationships, including online safety."

"Social worker changes are difficult – you have to start to trust a new person and tell them about your past."

4. Education, Employment and Training

Education, Employment and Training was rated as a top three priority for both children in care and care leavers, however children and young people answering the easy-read version aimed at young children, disabled children and those with English as an additional language gave it a lower priority.

Issues included low enjoyment levels of school, importance of feeling a sense of belonging and safety in school, support with transitions and barriers to education, employment and training.

"I am worried I am missing out on my learning because I'm not at school."

"I want to know about my GCSE options."

"I want to learn about different jobs."

"Lately I have been having a hard time and felt like giving up. This [work experience] week has given me the motivation to continue to be the best version of myself and to work hard on my career."

"ALL social workers and PAs need more information on procedures for care leavers going to university. I've encountered so many hurdles which my social workers and PAs had no idea about. I had to do it all on my own. Please touch up on this."

5. Other

Connection and Belonging:

Maintaining support networks for children in care and care leavers is a longstanding issue. Care Leavers nationally report very high levels of loneliness and isolation. Children in care are liable to experience significant disruption to their support networks through changes of school or carers.

For children answering the easy-read consultation connection and belonging was a top three priority; children in care and care leavers gave it a lower priority, however two out of the six specific comments from across the cohort related to the importance of connection and opportunity for activities and hobbies.

In the annual children in care survey 11–18-year-olds scored low for questions on life satisfaction and worthwhile activity (50% rated life satisfaction as 1 or 2 out of 5; 67% rated a 2 or below for feeling like the things they do in life are worthwhile).

The independent reviewing service reported that across the entire cohort of children in care connection with family and friends was the most frequently raised issue by children at their review meetings.

The care leaver poll highlighted healthy relationships as a key issue for care-experienced young people, specifically looking at making sure that young people are leaving our service with people in their life that they can rely on and trust.

Other issues included consistency of worker, being able to get in touch with workers easily and time to get to know them and spend time together, having access to hobbies and opportunities.



Transitions

The Independent Reviewing Service reported that transitions and change is the third most frequently raised issue by children and young people at their review meetings.

84% of 11–18-year-olds reported low levels of feeling positive about their future (scoring 3 or below out of 5; 34% scoring 2 or below out of 5)

Children and young people with special education needs and disabilities (a cohort which represents almost half of Bristol’s children in care, although includes responses from children who aren’t in care) say transitions to adult services need to be better; however 66% said that adults help them prepare for changes in the future.

Knowing and understanding rights was the top priority for care leavers in a recent poll.

Support for key transitions, and support post 25 was raised as an issue by children and young people.

“If no-one tells me I may start making things up in my mind about what might happen and that doesn’t really help.”

“We need help to manage changes, we need to feel supported with that.”

“I want workers to listen and to make every right clear.”

Identity and story

40% of 11-18s in Bristol feel they are treated differently for being in care

The recent Independent Reviewing Service survey said that life story work, children having an understanding of their story, and children having clear arrangements for how they stay in touch with family are issues that are consistently brought up by children in their review meetings.

Children and young people also raised importance of addressing stigma, lifestory work – including support to access records, specific offers for minority groups such as care leaver parents and LGBTQ+ young people.

“I sometimes feel different to others because I am looked after by my nan.”

“I want to understand why I am where I am.”

“I want to choose the right path in life.”

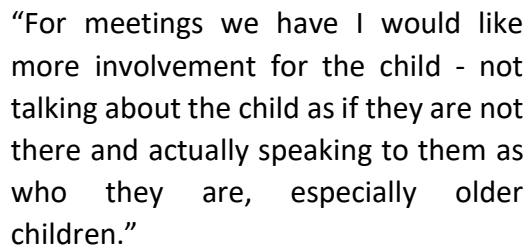
“We need help to feel comfortable with who we are.”

“We need people around us to be role models.”

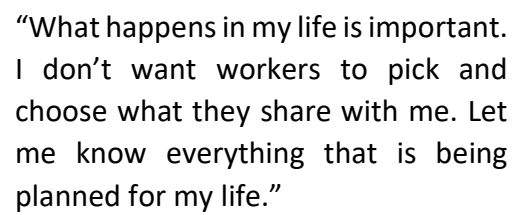
Having a voice

Being listened to and included in decision-making high priority for the care leaver group, second only to feeling safe.

A Coram voice report showed that being included in decision-making is a key factor in the wellbeing of children in care and care leavers



"For meetings we have I would like more involvement for the child - not talking about the child as if they are not there and actually speaking to them as who they are, especially older children."



"What happens in my life is important. I don't want workers to pick and choose what they share with me. Let me know everything that is being planned for my life."

References

- Bristol's Annual Children in care survey results 2023
- Feedback from focus groups with Bristol's children in care and care leaver participation groups
- [Coram Voice: response to the Care Review](#)
- Top 10 Priorities for Care Leavers developed by [National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum](#)
- Consultation on priorities for new Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Care Leaver survey for shadow board
- IRO survey
- Top 10 Asks – Young People's Benchmarking Forum
- Bristol self-evaluation of social work practice – awaiting publication
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Consultation

Section 2 – Workforce and Carers

Introduction

This section summarises workforce feedback from the following sources

- Consultation exercises with Corporate Parenting Panel, staff from Through Care, Leaving Care, Fostering, Children’s Homes and Disabled Children, extended leadership team for children in care and care leavers (permanency and specialist services)
- Corporate Parenting Strategy workforce consultation – internal and external staff

There were 30 staff and carer responses from a range of agencies including social care, health, police, education, voluntary sector, as well as foster carers in the corporate parenting strategy survey. Around 150 staff took part in the consultation exercises over a six-month period. The feedback is set out thematically.

6. Homes and Housing

Providing safe and loving homes was a top three priority for the workforce.

Feedback focused on the following three themes:

- Choice and availability of accommodation for young people leaving care enabling positive transitions for young people into supportive communities in a planned way, especially for young people with safeguarding and/or complex needs.
- Increasing recruitment and retention of foster carers to ensure children can be well-matched with the right carers on first coming into care, and are able to remain close to their communities.
- Improving stability for children and young people to avoid further disruption to their networks and feelings of safety.

7. Health and Wellbeing

Feedback focused on the following four themes:

- Timely, accessible mental health services that make appropriate accommodations for care-experienced children and young people
- Children in care and care leavers experience trauma-informed support in every interaction and across all services
- Enhanced offer for children in care and care leavers in recognition of the additional health issues they are likely to experience

- Early identification for special educational needs and disabilities, neurodivergence and any speech and language needs

8. Safeguarding

There was a strong sense among the workforce that safeguarding is one of the core foundations for enabling all other work to take place – and that if children and young people don't feel safe then work on other priority areas will be undermined.

The feedback centred around the following themes:

- Improved contextual safeguarding interventions
- Approaches around children going missing need to be therapeutic
- Reduce additional demands on worker time enabling them to build trusted relationships with their children in order to keep them safe
- Improve social worker retention to promote stability and safety for children

9. Education, Employment and Training

Carers and staff rated education, employment and training as their top priority.

Feedback was focused on the following areas:

- Improved attainment and attendance for children in care through supportive school environments
- Enhanced offer for children with special educational needs and disabilities
- Increased inclusion rates through use of full timetables, appropriate provision and reduced exclusions and moves
- Range of apprenticeship and work opportunities for care leavers through Bristol City Council and its partners
- Supportive opportunities for young people to return to education post 21

10. Other

Additional feedback from consultations included access to hobbies, opportunities and support networks, interventions to reduce loneliness and isolation, improved co-production mechanisms, support for children and young people to understand and celebrate their cultural identity as well as understand their life story, and increased support from the council and its key partners as part of their corporate parenting responsibility.

As part of the Corporate Parenting Strategy survey consultation there was additional feedback from staff and carers focusing on the 'caring for those who care' priority. A strong

theme that came through was enabling staff to spend more time with young people in order to offer the right support and to build meaningful relationships. There was also a number of answers relating to improving the support offer for staff and carers through supervision, training, more streamlined work and admin processes, and increased time off for carers. Other ideas included discounted access to activities and transport.

Feedback relating to the wording for the values and building blocks yielded some interesting insights from staff and carers. The consensus was that these structural components are all important for the strategy but some of the sub-headings needed amending, for example specifying hope and potential as well as ambition.

There was a strong consensus that trauma-informed practice and its key principles needs to be front and centre of the strategy, and that embedding a culture of trauma-informed working across the partnership will be critical to the success of the strategy.

There were also questions on how the inclusion of these components, including the priorities themselves, would be embedded in order to generate meaningful change for children and young people. Staff and carer feedback supports the priorities, values/behaviours and building blocks but feel less clear about how these will be implemented without additional investment in services.