



OUR  
EPIC  
PLAN

BRISTOL CORPORATE

PARENTING STRATEGY

2021 – 2023



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# Children and young people's foreword

Message from Bristol's care-experienced children and young people to all Bristol Corporate Parents:

## Dear Corporate Parents,

We are children, we just happen to be in care. We don't want to be stereotyped and we don't want special treatment. Please don't make assumptions about us.

What you need to know is we are all different and you can't put us all in one category.

We would like your help and support.

What we want for our future is help to get the education that we want and for you to have high expectations for us, help us get the right housing when we need it, help us to get work experience, jobs and help us to find out what we can do. And have opportunities to access activities to meet other people.

We will know you have taken on our views if you ask questions to understand us, stay in touch with us and tell us what you are doing about our views.

**Children in Care  
Council Bristol**

## Dear Corporate Parents,

We are Bristol Care Leavers.

We would like to be heard and valued. We want to have a voice. We are all unique in our own different ways.

We may have similar pasts but we have different approaches to reaching our similar goal: to be successful in life.

We need to be genuinely supported, like a family.

We need you to care about us as individual people and to show that you care not just because you are paid to do so.

We might need second chances, which other young people would get automatically.

We need positive reinforcement. Please build us up.

We might need a helping hand to achieve and thrive

**Care Leavers Unite Bristol**

# Mayor's foreword



I am passionate about making sure Bristol is a city of hope and aspiration, where everyone can share in its success. Central to this vision is making sure everyone can play their part in supporting Bristol's children, and making Bristol the best place to grow up in for a child in the care of this city.

I am extremely proud of Bristol's children in care and care leavers and I am committed to do all I can to support them to benefit from the many opportunities our great city has to offer. In all we do we want children and young people who have experienced care to

feel loved, accepted and safe. I particularly want to thank our skilled, dedicated and compassionate foster carers and staff for their commitment as we have navigated the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic together.

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy builds on our vision for children and young people as set out in the One City Plan and our Corporate Strategy 2018-23 that commits us to be great corporate parents. We will build on the structures that have already been established for children in care and care leavers to be the best corporate parents we can be. This strategy underpins our commitment to champion Bristol's children and young people and to ensure they have every opportunity to live happy and fulfilling lives.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rees'.

**Marvin Rees** Mayor of Bristol



## Introduction

Corporate Parenting is the term used in law to describe our collective responsibility to care for, love and champion our children in care and our care leavers and ensure they have every opportunity to reach their full potential as they grow up in our family.

We are proud to have long-standing support from our key partners and businesses in Bristol who have embraced an Extended Corporate Family role in supporting children. We want to continue to foster and build upon those links to make our city the best place for care-experienced Bristolians to live.

This strategy is a result of **conversations**<sup>1</sup> with children and young people, who are the experts in their experience and with their families and carers involved in their journey. This strategy is about working with children and young people in a collaborative and co-productive way as we acknowledge they have the right and responsibility to shape how services work for them. In developing this strategy, we drew on Bristol's new Belonging Strategy for children and families in Bristol, and our Corporate Strategy as well as the **Corporate Parenting Principles**<sup>2</sup> and the **Top 10 Messages**<sup>3</sup> presented at the National Care-experienced Conference.

This strategy describes our city approach to delivering on those Corporate Parenting Principles to improve the lives of the children in and leaving our care. It outlines our vision and approach, reports on some of our recent achievements and developments and sets out how we intend to achieve our goals. We will also outline the context in which this strategy sits, and the governance structure in place to ensure that our vision is achieved. Our preferred terminology is care-experienced child or young person as this is what young people have told us they prefer and encompasses children and young people at every stage of their journey.



<sup>1</sup> Coram Bright Spot Publications (2017 – 2020), Corporate Parenting Survey to children, young people, carers and professionals (July 2020), BCC Care Leaver Survey (May 2020), Focus groups with children in care and care leavers (September 2020)

<sup>2</sup> Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers: Statutory guidance for local authorities February 2018, p.8

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.careexperiencedconference.com/reports>

## This strategy sits alongside our Pledge to children in care and care leavers which outlines our commitments to them, and the support they can expect from us.

In 2017 the Children and Social Work Act introduced a set of Corporate Parenting Principles for our children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25 that underpin everything we do and are referenced below.

- Act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of our children and young people.
- Encourage our children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- Take into account the views, wishes and feelings of our children and young people
- Help our children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- Promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for our children and young people.
- Be safe, have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- Prepare our children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

We want to learn from the experiences of children and young people and have incorporated the Top 10 Messages from Care-experienced Conference 2019 into this strategy.

- 1 Promote more love in the care system including displays of positive physical affection;
- 2 Ensure care-experienced people are regarded and treated as individuals worthy of respect and to promote that respect wherever we can;

- 3 Ensure that relationships are seen as central to all our policies and procedures to support children in care and care-experienced people;
- 4 Take clear steps to improve stability and continuity in the lived experiences of people in care;
- 5 Work with our partners and young people to raise awareness of need and improve support for the mental health and well-being of children in care and care-experienced people in our local area;
- 6 Recognise in our daily work that the impact of care experience does not end at 18 or 21 or even 25, and review our practice to remove age restrictions on support wherever we can;
- 7 Protect, promote and where necessary rebuild family and community connections and help those young people for whom we are responsible to understand their personal history;
- 8 Make sure that young people in our care are routinely engaged, consulted and have a real say in their own lives
- 9 Ensure that young people in our care are properly and fully informed of their rights and offer advocacy to ensure they receive them;
- 10 Listen to the voice of children in care and care-experienced people of all ages and always consult them about changes to services and support.



## Our vision

Bristol is committed to being an effective, caring and ambitious corporate parent and we will show this through our love, our language and our actions. We will do everything we can to make sure that our care-experienced children are set up for life.

We are loving parents and we care about our children and young people, not just for them. We will ensure the same standard of care as any good parent which means we will have high aspirations for our children and will be strong advocates for them. We will do everything we can to equip the children and young people with the skills needed to live a fulfilling, successful, and rewarding life that is full of love.

We want Bristol to be a 'Care Aware' city that champions our children in care and our care leavers. We will take bold and innovative steps to ensure that the people who are privileged to parent our children have the right training, support, knowledge and skills that our children need and deserve.

This strategy is part of a broad range of activity that supports our shared aim to improve provision for children in care and care leavers including:

- Our co-produced Pledge to Children in Care and Care leavers and a local offer for care leavers
- A multi-agency Corporate Parenting Panel chaired by the Cabinet Member for Women, Families and Homes
- An active Children in Care Council and Care Leaver Forum to ensure that the voices of young people remain central to our work
- A Corporate Parenting annual report that is owned by Corporate Parenting Panel and presented to full council
- Equality and Inclusion Policy and Strategy 2018 – 23
- The HOPE Virtual School working with schools, colleges, training providers, education settings and children's social care to improve educational outcomes for children in care and care leavers
- A Placement Sufficiency Plan 2020-23 that sets out how we will deliver the range and number of high quality placements needed by children in care and care leavers
- A Youth Housing Plan that includes the Youth MAPS Service dedicated to preventing homelessness and supporting delivery of the Corporate Strategy 2018 – 23
- A commitment to ensuring that corporate parenting responsibilities are embedded in all applicable policies, strategies and commissioning arrangements.
- Delivery of Bristol's Belonging Strategy for Children, Young People and Families 2021 – 23.
- The council's overarching Corporate Strategy 2018 - 23, in particular, 'Well-being' and 'Empowering and Caring' themes and the key commitment to be 'great corporate parents and safeguard children and vulnerable adults, protecting them from exploitation or harm'.
- Bristol THRIVE Model – whole community approach to improving mental health and well-being













## Identity: Children and young people have a strong sense of self, and an understanding of their care story.

The rich diversity of Bristol is reflected in the children we care for and we recognise the importance for children to understand their history and their journey. We want help our children strengthen their sense of identity by understanding who they are, where they came from and all that they can achieve.

### You said:

*I don't know anything about my dad – I don't know if he is very nice or not. I feel nervous and scared.*

*Children need to have an understanding of where they've come from.*

*I think a camp where only care leavers and kids in care go. Necessary because I grew up not knowing any other children in my situation which made me feel like a black sheep in my friendship groups.*

*Drop the 'children in care' – we are just CHILDREN – because it sounds like we're different or have a problem when you say 'in care'.*

*I can't see my future without the state of England I need your help.*

*Empower us to take charge of our own stories.*

### We will:

- 1 Promote agreed terminology across the city for children in care and care leavers, in partnership with them, to avoid jargon or language that makes them feel uncomfortable or different.
- 2 Develop a cultural intelligence project to support and promote children and young people's cultural needs and to celebrate diversity.
- 3 Propose the inclusion of 'care experience' as a local Protected Characteristic to promote a culture of inclusion, social justice and equality.
- 4 Develop Bristol's Narrative model for children to understand their lives and the part others have played in order to build their resilience and sense of self.
- 5 Promote and champion the specific needs of unaccompanied and separate young people across the city and refresh the city offer including support with acquiring citizenship.

## Co-production: Children and young people are at the heart of service design, delivery and evaluation.

We believe that children and young people, as well as families and carers, are the experts of their own experiences which are valued and respected. Children and young people's voices must be heard to shape and design the delivery of services that are provided to them.

### You said:

*Most important thing is to be listened to and respected.*

*Feeling involved in what's going on.*

*Feeling included in social work decision making.*

*I would teach you to be confident about whatever they really needed to talk about. I would teach them about all their rights especially racism or hate crime so they know who they can report if any of that happens to them. I wished somebody explained all my rights at that time so I would never stay quiet.*

*I want to have choice in where I live.*

*For things to be changed when you ask for it.*

### We will:

- 1 Develop a co-production practice framework in partnership with children and young people to ensure that everyone has a chance to have their views heard. We will ensure that "lesser heard" voices are amplified, especially for disabled children and/or children living away from Bristol.
- 2 Build on the success of the Care Leaver Ambassadors by increasing pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships for Care Leavers in the council. Expand the roles to include Recruiter, Trainer and Assessor/Auditor that support co-production activity and work with council teams and partner organisations to be 'Care Aware'.
- 3 Create a safe space for parents and carers to come together and share their experiences and ideas to help us review our practice quality and inform service development.
- 4 Review foster care assessment process with existing foster carers and young people and seek to involve young assessors who stay a weekend with prospective carers and report their findings to the Bristol Fostering Panel.
- 5 Work with young people and our health and education colleagues to streamline the number of meetings for children in care (PEPS, health assessments, reviews).

# Priority

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## Home and Housing: Children and young people will live somewhere where they feel a sense of safety and belonging and are loved.

We need to ensure access to a range of high-quality options to meet the needs of children in our care. In order to offer children stability and the opportunity to maintain important relationships we need to be able to place the majority of children in well-matched local homes near children's schools and communities. Our **Placement Sufficiency Plan 2020 – 23** will underpin our work in this area.

### You said:



### We will:

- 1 We will continue to develop our own children's homes including smaller children's homes and a bespoke home for disabled children.
- 2 Develop Bristol Fostering Communities to encourage family connection and support for carers and children in our city (Bristol Mockingbird Model).
- 3 Develop a project to explore the viability of innovative options such as Kinder Homes or 'BIG' Homes (Bristol Inter-Generational) to maintain children being able to stay in their community, keep sibling groups together and promote stability.
- 4 Review the housing needs of young people 16 – 21 and design a new offer.
- 5 Develop psychologically-informed home environments for children's homes and foster homes as part of The Bristol Model to promote good emotional regulation for children.
- 6 We will create fostering ambassadors within the Somali community to improve diversity amongst our foster carer population.

# Priority

7

## Health and Support: Improve health and well-being by ensuring high quality health services and information are provided to children, young people and carers.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) can impact greatly on the short and long term health and well-being of our children in care and care leavers. The prioritisation of health strategies such as Thrive Bristol to promote recovery and build resilience within the children in care and care leaver population is vital for optimal health outcomes. Care-experienced children and young people need to be able to easily access the services available, as well as making use of specialist services where necessary.

### You said:



### We will:

- 1 Co-produce the new care leaver health offer for young people aged 14 – 25 with the aim of reducing the variation in health service delivery for care-experienced people. The focus is on removing barriers to accessing appropriate resources that support healthy and safe transition to adulthood. Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire CCG has been chosen to be one of two pilot sites for the NHS England care leaver offer, starting in 2020.
- 2 Work together to review learning and actions resulting from the 2020 peer review of the child in care health services across the BNSSG footprint.
- 3 Cement The Bristol Model across and within all services for children in care and care leavers, ensuring that therapeutic practice is embedded by extending the offer of our Therapeutic Support Service. Provide an intensive therapeutic support programme for adolescents, with increased input to our children's homes. Underpin reunification by developing a family therapy offer.
- 4 Expand the Therapeutic Support Service to include an intensive therapeutic support programme for adolescents to increase stability and support them to remain within their own city, minimising placement disruption.



## Caring for those who care: Children and young people are nurtured by carers and workers who are well-resourced, valued and supported.

We recognise that it is important to support the networks around children and young people to ensure that carers are happy, committed, confident, skilled and resilient so that they are emotionally present and available to support our children and young people.

### You said:



### We will:

- 1 Provide opportunities for connection, belonging and training for children, young people, carers and staff through shared office and communal spaces.
- 2 Promote a more normalised family life experience and reduce difference and stigma through piloting the One Social Worker model for children in permanent foster homes safely reducing the number of professionals visiting the child.
- 3 Ensure our Foster Carers are nurtured, supported and equipped to provide high-quality care through the launch of a Well-being Offer.
- 4 Recognise and reward carers for the important work they do by reviewing the Bristol City Council Foster Care allowances and fees structure.
- 5 Enable current foster carers to continue providing loving homes for children and young people, and encourage new foster carers to join us through bringing forward a proposal for council tax relief for Bristol City Council foster carers.
- 6 Show our value and appreciation for all our staff and carers by promoting "Care with Pride" across the city where we champion the excellence of our carers and workers.

## How have we been doing?

Progress against the 7 Corporate Parenting Priorities we set out in 2018.

Strategic Objective	What's been working well	The challenges that remain
<b>Priority 1 – Families receive the help they need when they need it (Right Child, Right Service, Right Time, Right Place). We will strengthen our offer to families.</b>	<p>The development of Strengthening Families, Edge of Care and the Reunification Teams (18 children have successfully returned home to live) have continued to support children and their families be together and stay together. This is coupled with reducing case-loads (from 24 to 17).</p> <p>Our rate of children in care per 10,000 children has fallen from 73 in 2016/17 to 66 in 2019/20 for our statistical neighbours this was 83 in 2018/19. This includes our unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who make up 7% of the children in care an increase from 6% in 2016/17.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the Safer Options Team (extra familial harm response).</li> <li>• Implement the Prevention of Care Panel and develop an out of hour's service.</li> <li>• Reduce allocations to 15 children per social worker.</li> <li>• Develop family therapy approaches: supporting families to understand their stories and strengthen their relationships.</li> <li>• Consider a Therapeutic Life Story</li> <li>• Dedicated role to support parental trauma and mental health.</li> <li>• Reunification support offer for children and families living out of the Bristol area.</li> </ul>
<b>Priority 2 – Children are supported to live safely within their families or with people who know them best. When this is not possible, children move to a permanent family or care placement without delay.</b>	<p>The number of Special Guardianship Orders increased significantly from 22 to 46. 21% of our children in foster care live with a connected person. Adoption timeliness remains better than the England average and Bristol makes good use of early permanence options.</p> <p>96% of children in care have a plan for permanence. 2019/20 saw continued long-term placement stability at 73% (England average is 70%). Timeliness of reviews has remained strong at 95%.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging the family network at the earliest opportunity.</li> <li>• Develop the Network building /finding with care leavers.</li> <li>• Co-produce care and pathway plans with children and their networks – writing 'to' the child.</li> <li>• An agreed language (the words we use).</li> </ul>

Strategic Objective	What's been working well	The challenges that remain
<p><b>Priority 3 – Children and young people tell us what's important to them and this influences what we do and the way we design and develop our services.</b></p>	<p>Care leaver Bright Spots and COVID surveys.</p> <p>Child in Care Council and CLUB well established.</p> <p>Established care leaver Facebook page.</p> <p>Children consistently involved in staff interview panels.</p> <p>There have been eight Twilight Corporate Parenting Panels involving young people since 2018.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dedicated co-production strategy for children in care to include their role in designing, developing and commissioning the services including wider representation of the whole child in care and care leaver population.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority 4 – Being in care is an enriching experience that equips children for a successful life.</b></p>	<p>EPIC and STARS celebrations occur annually.</p> <p>The Hope Virtual School celebrate and reward school attendance and run an annual poetry competition.</p> <p>Care leavers have a priority interview if they meet essential criteria for Bristol City Council posts.</p> <p>Care leavers in Bristol are exempt from Council Tax.</p> <p>110 young people are currently undertaking the ASDAN qualification.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop the EPIC Charity</li> <li>The ASDAN course in different languages.</li> <li>Care leavers who live outside of Bristol are not exempt from Council Tax – develop a regional (and national) offer</li> </ul>



Strategic Objective	What's been working well	The challenges that remain
<p><b>Priority 5 – Deliver good quality care placements and move on accommodation for care leavers locally.</b></p>	<p>Therapeutic programme has a good success rate. Pilot programme for adolescents started June 2020. Children in the same placement for two or more years has improved in 2019/20 to 73% from 71% and is above the 69% for our statistical neighbours and the England average.</p> <p>80% of children in care live in a foster home. 63% of these children live in the local authority's own provision compared to the England average of 50%.</p> <p>18% of children aged between 18 and 21 have staying put arrangements in place; 25% of these young people are unaccompanied asylum seekers.</p> <p>Re-profiling of the children's homes has had a focus of bringing children placed outside, back to Bristol.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop regional leisure offer</li> <li>Securing funding for the therapeutic adolescence programme to continue beyond June 2021.</li> <li>Accommodation for young people at risk of CCE and CSE, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and UAS care leavers; accommodation for 16+ year olds that need high levels of support.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority 6 – Hold high aspirations and close the attainment gap for children in care and increase the percentage of care leavers in education, training and employment.</b></p>	<p>Improved educational outcomes and attendance (above National benchmark) for children in care.</p> <p>The Virtual School Head is leading on Education's 'Belonging Strategy'.</p> <p>Reboot is in its second year in Through Care, supporting engagement and improvement in EET.</p> <p>74% of care leavers aged 17 or 18 are EET (England average was 64%) and 63% of care leavers aged 19 to 21 are EET (England average is 52%).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for children with SEND</li> <li>Exclusions are too high for all children in Bristol.</li> <li>Placement stability and school continuity (key in improving outcomes).</li> <li>Alternative education offer.</li> <li>Education settings being trauma informed.</li> </ul>

Strategic Objective	What's been working well	The challenges that remain
<p><b>Priority 7 –</b> Improve health and well-being by ensuring high quality health services and information are provided to children, young people and carers.</p>	<p>94% of our children have had a review health assessment. 98% of our children's immunisations are up to date.</p> <p>Personal budgets pilot was successful and is ongoing.</p> <p>Thinking Allowed – dedicated CAMHS team.</p> <p>Bristol will pilot a health service for care leavers to the age of 25.</p> <p>Through Care has a link worker from Off the Record.</p> <p>A dedicated placement support team that provide therapeutic, trauma informed support and interventions for carers and children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging older children who opt out of their health assessments.</li> </ul>





