



# Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022 – 2023

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*“Children, Young People and Families at the heart of all we do - in every decision  
we make and every action we take”*

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## Introduction

Welcome to the annual report for Northamptonshire's Corporate Parenting Board. This sets out the activity of the Board for the 2022-23 period, and some of the exciting developments happening within Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

Corporate parenting means giving the same level of care and support that any parent would want for their own child. Parenting does not simply stop as a young person reaches maturity, so this responsibility extends to helping children in care successfully transition to independent adulthood. Celebrating children and young people is also important, and it is wonderful that we have reintroduced large-scale, annual celebration events. As well as celebrating 'headline' achievements such as sporting and academic excellence, we want to highlight the small steps our children make which add up to massive progress. This can mean simply feeling able to sit with foster carers for a meal or having a phone call with a family member.

Young people have made an increasingly important contribution to Board over the year, not least our new care-experienced Board member, and our fantastic care-experienced Apprentice Champions. There is more to do, however, to make sure young people have a major say in the operation of the Board and shaping our services.

Many innovative and far-reaching initiatives are helping to improve outcomes for Northamptonshire children and young people, and partnership working with other organisations is a recurrent theme of these initiatives. New monthly panels, for example, are helping children secure a permanent home at the earliest possible stage, and helping older young people transition to independence. The Valuing Care project, which commenced in February 2023, is helping the right resources reach the children who need them most. The project is taking place in collaboration with Impower and operates through the principles of therapeutic care.

A diagnostic exercise with the Local Government Association highlighted many strengths of the Board, as well as opportunities and areas for improvement. The outcomes of this were insightful and welcome. The decision has been taken that henceforth each council will operate its own Board, in keeping with Ofsted's requirement to assess each council's data separately. We relish this challenge, which will increase elected members' capacity to scrutinise and challenge services for children and young people in their areas.

## Executive Summary

Corporate parenting means promoting the same outcomes that any good parent wants for their child. This responsibility for local authorities and their partners is set out in legislation, government publications and statutory guidance.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust delivers children's social care across the county on behalf of West and North Northamptonshire Councils. During the financial year 2022-23, the Corporate Parenting Board met five times, and remained a single entity covering the whole county. It was chaired by both councils' elected lead members with cabinet responsibility for children's social care. As of May 2023, the Board has disaggregated, with each council facilitating its own Board.

Aside from its own annual report, during 2022-23 the Board received and scrutinised annual reports from the Independent Reviewing Officer Service, fostering and adoption services, the Virtual School, and the Integrated Care Board. Statutory health assessments remained an issue of intense scrutiny for the Board, but members were somewhat reassured by the remedial actions being undertaken.

Every Board meeting included a scorecard of selected metrics, prompting debate and challenge from Board members. This showed recovery in terms of some key health-related metrics, and continuing strong performance in terms of care leavers in employment, education and training. Ad-hoc and thematic reports to the Board included a detailed presentation around the sufficiency of foster places and the challenges therein; services available for young people leaving care, including disparities in council tax exemption schemes between the two councils; an update on a national safeguarding review for children with disabilities in residential placements; and care-experienced people's contact with the criminal justice system.

Although there is more to do, the Board made sure young people's voices were heard and utilised. A care-experienced young person was recruited to the Board as a full member, and the Board liaised with the Trust's participation groups. In many cases, young people contributed to the reports and presentations which came to Board, particularly the leaving care item. Every Board included a dedicated slot for celebrating the achievements of children and young people, and a very successful celebration event took place in July 2022 with children nominated for awards in four categories.

The Local Government Association diagnostic exercise in March 2023 highlighted many strengths of the Board and areas for opportunities and improvement. The Trust's Young Inspectors team contributed to this valuable process. Key outcomes included the need for greater young people's participation in Board, and a shared vision of corporate parenting among members.

Northamptonshire's improvement journey is captured in the overarching Improvement Plan, which lists aims and activities in six key areas: excellent leadership; recruit, retain and develop an awesome workforce; relationship-based practice; quality assurance and learning; healthy partnerships; and effective use of resources. Key developments include the Valuing Care project, the Sufficiency Strategy and new panels created to promote children's early permanence and transition to independence.

The Trust's Corporate Parenting Strategy includes four aims which we want to achieve for children and young people: live safe, be safe; fulfil potential; develop resilience; and enjoy good health and wellbeing.

## 1. Governance and Statutory Context

### What is corporate parenting?

Local authorities and their partners are responsible for ensuring that care-experienced children and young people are as safe and well cared for as any other child. This responsibility is called 'corporate parenting' and applies equally to children who have entered the UK from overseas and are separated from their families. Corporate parenting duty rests not only with social workers and their managers, but also any other agency that provides services and support to children in care such as health services, housing departments, the police and schools. Corporate parents have specific duties for young people leaving care and making the journey to independence.

### Legal background

The collective responsibility for local authorities was first laid out in the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The central role of councils as effective corporate parents has been emphasised by government in the publications *Care Matters: Time for Change* (DCSF 2007), *Care Matters: Time to Deliver* (DCSF 2008), and consolidated in aspects of the Children and Young Persons Act (2008). Other legislation and statutory guidance that determine our duties include:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 Children and Adoption Act 2006
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (as amended by the Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014
- The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018
- Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2000

## Principles of corporate parenting

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 provided a welcome distillation of corporate parenting responsibilities through seven principles of corporate parenting. Local authorities and their partners are required:

1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
4. To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

The Act introduced some new responsibilities relating to children in care and care leavers. These include a requirement to publish a 'Local Offer to Care Leavers,' setting out the services available to young people leaving care, extend the provision of personal adviser support to all care leavers up to the age of 25 and to provide education advice and guidance to young people formerly in care. The Act also introduces a number of requirements to ensure that court processes are focussed on long term plans for and specific needs of the child.

## The Care Leavers Charter

The Care Leavers' Charter is a set of promises to care leavers, published by the Government in 2012. It is "Designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good corporate parents." The Charter will "Remain constant through any changes in legislation, regulation and guidance."

We promise:

- To respect and honour your identity
- To listen to you
- To believe in you

- To inform you
- To be a lifelong champion
- To support you
- To find you a home

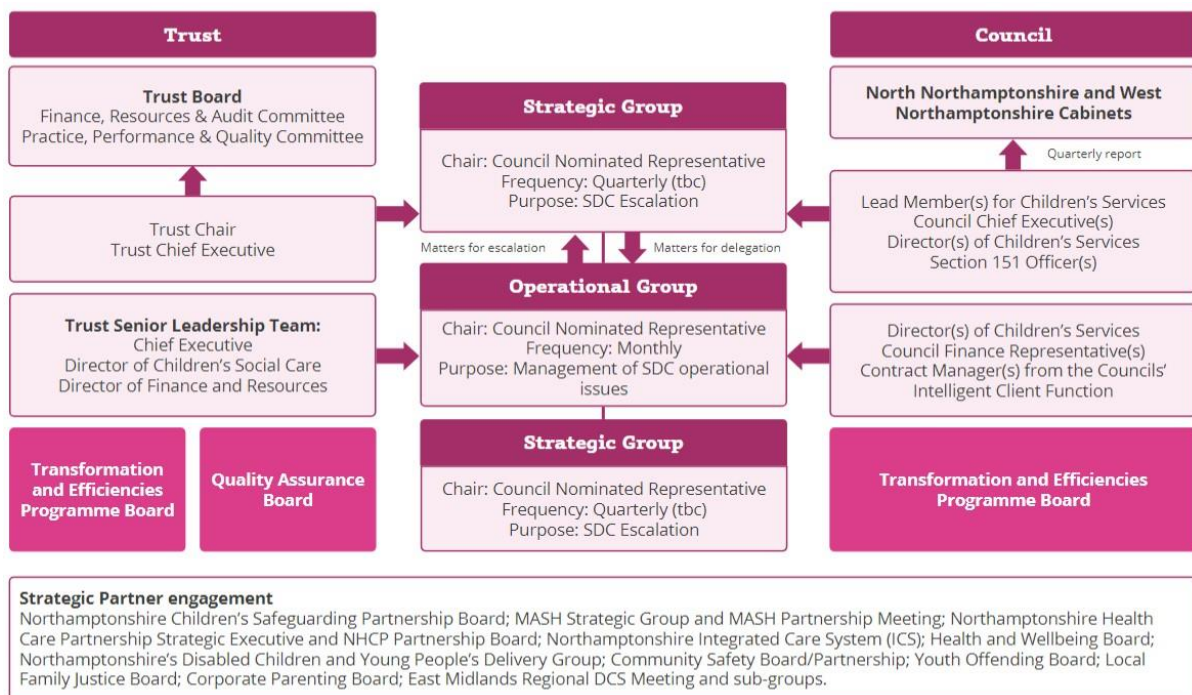
NCT has developed a separate set of promises to care leavers which have been adopted by the Board.

### [NCT and the move to unitary authorities](#)

From April 2021 Northamptonshire County Council and seven district and borough councils were replaced by two new councils: North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council. Some services which were delivered by different councils were brought together (aggregated), while others which were delivered by the county council were split (disaggregated).

Northamptonshire Children's Trust was established on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2020 to deliver children's social care across the county. It is owned by West and North Northamptonshire councils but in order to achieve operational independence it has its own board of directors which sets strategic aims for the Trust, oversees its management and holds the executive team to account.

## Northamptonshire Children's Trust governance arrangements



## The disaggregation of the Corporate Parenting Board, 2023

A decision was taken at the inception of NCT for there to be a single Corporate Parenting Board inclusive of both councils, with shared chairing duties. However, as of May 2023, each council will hold its own Corporate Parenting Board. This decision was geared to allowing each council greater scrutiny and accountability, and ultimately better outcomes, for children and young people under their remit. The decision to disaggregate also reflects Ofsted's requirement for disaggregated data for the two councils.

## The Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers

The Board's pledge to young people in care and care leavers was drawn up in conjunction with the Children in Care Council and is available to view on the Young Northants and the Trust's websites.

### We will help you be physically and emotionally healthy

We will have achieved this when:

- You have the right support for your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and you do not have to wait too long for it.
- The adults close to you understand your needs.
- You have a good understanding of your health needs and history, when you are in care and when you leave care.

### We will make sure you are living in the right place



We will have achieved this when:

- You are living with people who understand you, care for you well and build a positive relationship with you.
- You have a safe and stable home life.
- Where you are living does not affect how well you are looked after.

**We will make sure you have great relationships in your life**

We will have achieved this when:

- You have regular contact with those who are important to you, as long as it's safe.
- You understand why you are in care and are involved with the plans that affect your life.
- We are warm and courteous towards you, do what we say we will, and respect your culture and identity.
- You have enough quality time with the adults (social worker, personal adviser, teacher, doctor, nurse) who are there to support you, at a time that is convenient to you.
- Changes of social worker or personal adviser are avoided wherever possible. Any changes are explained to you, and you are introduced to the new person properly.

**We will make sure you get a good education**

We will have achieved this when:

- You are achieving the best you can.
- You have a stable school where you feel safe.
- You feel part of your school community and are able to take part in clubs and activities.
- You have adults who understand your needs and put the right things in place to support them.

**We will help you prepare for the future**

We will have achieved this when:

- As you become independent, you have a suitable place to live which feels like a proper home.
- You are in education, employment or training, helping you reach your potential.
- You are helped to manage your money effectively and get the right benefits.
- You have access to leisure services and can get around easily.

**We will involve you in developing our services and holding us to account**

We will have achieved this when:

- We celebrate your successes.
- We actively seek and take account of your views, wishes and feelings to improve our services to you.
- You can access useful and accurate information about services available and the people who can support you.
- You feel able to share complaints compliments and comments about our services.
- There is a range of opportunities for you to get involved to with helping to improve all services to children and young people.

## 2. Board Activity, 2022-23

### Membership and meeting arrangements

During the reporting period, a single Corporate Parenting Board operated in the county, with representation from both councils. It met every two months, aside from July 2022 when the meeting was cancelled to allow focus on the Children in Care Celebration and Awards. Meetings took place both in person and via video link. Cllr Scott Edwards (North) and Cllr Fiona Baker (West) shared chairing duties. As of March 2023, the membership of Board was as follows:

#### **West Northamptonshire members:**

Fiona Baker (Chair, Con), Louisa Fowler (Con), James Hill (Con), Stephen Hibbert (Con) Harry Barrett (Lab).

#### **North Northamptonshire members:**

Scott Edwards (Chair, Con), Lora Lawman (Con), Macauley Nichol (Con), Gill Mercer (Con) [replaced Cedwien Brown], Leanne Buckingham (Lab) [replaced Zoe McGhee].

Board was also attended by Trust officers and other representatives, including:

- Chief Executive Officer and Director of Children’s Social Care for Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT).
- Directors and Assistant Directors for Children’s Services, West and North Northamptonshire Councils.
- Assistant Director and Strategic Manager for Corporate Parenting, NCT.
- Head of Adoption, Fostering and Children’s Homes, NCT.
- Strategic Manager, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service, NCT.
- Principal Social Worker, NCT.
- Head of The Northamptonshire Virtual School.

- Head of the Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service.
- A Children's Trust board member.
- A care-experienced young person.
- Vice Chair, Northamptonshire Foster Carers Association.
- Assistant Director, Housing and Communities, WNC.
- Chief Nursing Officer and Designated Nurse, Northamptonshire Integrated Care Board.
- Corporate Parenting Project Officer (providing administration and other support), NCT.

Other NCT officers and representatives of partner agencies attended as required, on invitation.

## Annual reports

While Board is not a statutory body per se, legislation requires that an appropriate oversight body has sight of certain statutory annual reports. Our Board fulfils this function, providing scrutiny and oversight to NCT services. Where possible, reports for Board are summarised for presentation during the meeting, with the full reports being shared a week prior.

The following annual reports were scrutinised by Board during 2022-23. Note, however, that the annual reports related to the year 2021-22 unless otherwise stated.

### **The Independent Reviewing Officer Service.**

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) ensure care plans meet the needs of children and young people. They follow up on agreed actions and make sure people do what they say they will do. IROs chair children's statutory annual reviews, and make sure the child's voice is an integral part of the process.

NCT has 16 full-time and 1 part-time IRO, who between them chaired over 3000 children and young people's reviews during 2021-22, compared with just under 3000 the previous year. 87% of initial reviews took place within the statutory timeframe, with this figure rising to 90% for second reviews and 95% for those subsequent. Pleasingly, 92% of children participated in their review in some way, whether through the Mind of My Own children's mobile app, in person, a letter or other means. In many cases, children chaired their own review and chose the meeting location. Every IRO report now includes a letter written directly to the child or young person themselves. Government guidance recommends an IRO caseload of between 50 and 70. Our average caseload was 74 for the reporting period, reflecting the increasing children in care population.

During the year a new care plan format was developed in consultation with young people, which they reported finding easier to follow. The service continues to work closely with CAFCAS and regional IRO forums, to develop good practice and escalate concerns.

Locally, IROs raise formal and informal escalations on individual cases where there could be significant impact for children and young people. Key findings from this process are shared in a

quarterly report to the Quality Assurance Board. Arising themes are addressed in regular service managers' meetings and monthly performance clinics.

Ongoing priorities for the IRO service include ensuring that the voice of children and young people is central to review and care planning processes, and holding monthly meetings with service managers to share concerns and good practice. IROs are being encouraged to fully evidence the direct and indirect contact they have with children and young people and their families.

### **Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.**

The Board approved its annual report for the year 2021-22.

### **The Fostering Service.**

NCT's Independent Fostering Agency operates on behalf of both councils. The service undertakes many statutory functions concerning foster carers, including assessment and review, approval, supervision, support, and training.

At the end of the reporting period, 72% of children in care lived in a fostering placement, as opposed to residential care or other arrangements. Nationally and locally, recruitment and retention of foster carers remains a huge issue. Around 41% of Northamptonshire children in care live in agency foster care placements as opposed to 'in-house' placements. Finding suitable in-house placements for sibling groups, older children, and those with complex needs remains a challenge. 34 new foster carers were recruited by the end of the year, and although this was 3 less than the previous year, it represented a net gain of 2 households. The percentage of children who lived in the same placement for 2-plus years remained strong, at 66%, indicating that most children are placed in homes that meet their needs. In April 2022 there were 213 approved mainstream in-house fostering households, as well as 122 approved family and friend households.

The service undertakes a wide ranging of marketing activities to recruit new carers, including the use of Google adverts, Facebook campaigns, and web videos. Awareness days throughout the year such as Mother's Day and Hidden Heroes Day were also used to reach a wider audience. Our Christmas advent calendar on social media showed a different reason to foster for each day of the month, as shared by our carers. Through social media, the service shared 'a day in the life of' different roles such as a foster carer, social worker, panel advisor, and foster carers' birth children.

Other developments in the service include streamlining recruitment, assessment and approval processes; improving reporting systems; appointing a new registered manager; holding timely retention meetings with carers who are thinking of leaving; and further development of the resilience carer scheme, for children with complex needs. Staff have undergone secure base attachment and dyadic development training. Our foster carers, meanwhile, now have access to the National Association of Therapeutic Parenting. This provides access to training, webinars and

networks of support with a focus on therapeutic approaches. The service continues to strengthen its links with the Northampton Foster Carers Association, the vice-chair of which attends Board.

Board challenged the service regarding Regulation 24 cases. These are cases in which children are placed with people with whom they already share a connection. Fostering agencies are required to assess these places within a certain period, which can be extended to 24 weeks. The majority of the service's cases are assessed within timescale; if they are not assessed in time, it is often due to delays with medical or background checks. In some cases, it is appropriate for the child to be placed with their connected persons, without those persons being officially approved as foster carers, and the service understands the narrative behind all such cases.

### **The Adoption Service.**

Like the fostering service, the adoption service operates on behalf of both councils. Its remit includes recruiting and assessing prospective adoptive parents; family-finding for children who are being adopted; supporting families both before and after adoption; and helping adults who were adopted to access their records. The service includes the Adoption Panel, which considers approvals for adopters and proposed matches of children with adopters. The service is now part of Family Adoption Links, a Regional Adoption Alliance (RAA). This allows access to a wider range of training and resources, particularly in terms of finding matches for children, while retaining strategic control.

During the reporting year 26 children were matched with and placed with adoptive families. 41 children had a plan for adoption agreed, compared to 29 the previous year, an increase reflecting a recovery from the pandemic period. 26 new adopter households were approved, from 187 initial enquiries. 38 adoption orders were granted by the court. Positively, there were no adoption disruptions (that is, where a placement breaks down before the adoption order is granted) during the reporting year.

As with fostering, recruitment and retention activity includes a wide range of social media campaigning, in-person follow ups to enquiries, a comprehensive training offer, regular support groups and responsive actions taken when families are struggling. The service includes workers who are trained in therapeutic life story work and video interactive guidance. During the reporting period the service also sourced almost £1 million from the national Adoption Support Fund.

Board and the service itself agreed that the service's data collection systems require improvement; better systems will allow more time for practitioners to actively work with families. Other plans for the service include improving the feedback mechanisms for children and families, launching a new staff training plan and implementing the RAA's core training offer for adopters.

### **The Virtual School.**

The Virtual School (VS) is a statutory body which promotes the educational attainment of children in care. This involves monitoring and improving the timeliness and quality of Personal Educational Plans (PEPs); monitoring children's progress, attendance and exclusions; and devolving the centrally funded money set aside for the education of children in care. For the first time, the VS presented to Board separate reports for the North and West authorities. The reporting period was for the 2021-22 academic year. During that time, the VS quality assured 1083 PEPs for statutory school-age children for the North, and 1313 for the West, reflecting the children in care population size for each area. For both authorities, just under 80% of PEPs were rated Good, a substantial improvement from 64% (North) and 65% (West) in the previous academic year.

The VS continued its school holiday activity programme, with 139 children taking part in events, and delivered a wide range of training to school governors, teachers, carers, parents and guardians. After an update to legislation, the VS now also delivers advice and guidance to previously looked after children.

Priorities for the VS include improving the quality and timeliness of the bespoke early years and post-16 PEPs; supporting schools around new exclusions guidance; and helping services ensure they discharge their duties to children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities. The VS is also exploring the potential widening of its remit to include any children with a social worker.

Board challenged the VS regarding figures around fixed term exclusions for pupils, but acknowledged that the team proactively works with schools to explore alternative options. When appropriate the NCT Chief Executive has worked with council directors to avoid permanent exclusions for children in care.

### **The Integrated Care Board and the Health of Looked After Children.**

Northamptonshire's Integrated Care Board (ICB) reported to the Board on how it had met its statutory responsibilities for children in care. While they may of course have similar health needs to their peers, children in care often have more acute needs because of a history of neglect and abuse. This is particularly the case for children from overseas who are separated from their families; the ICB carries out specific programmes for these children, such as screening for blood-borne diseases.

Performance around statutory health assessments for children in care has been a protracted issue in Northamptonshire and nationally, particularly the timeliness of initial health assessments when a child first enters the care system. This issue was raised at most Board meetings through the year, with members providing robust scrutiny. Challenges have included the availability of paediatricians, and the difficulty of assessing children with complex needs placed out of county. Remedial actions taken to improve this picture include detailed mapping and analysis of health assessment procedures and extra staffing to address a backlog of review assessments. Board was reassured that as of December 2022, the proportion of initial assessments taking place on time had risen to around

84%. It should be noted that while too many children's health assessments are late, any child with a known health issue is prioritised and receives a timely assessment and follow-up care. Board's ICB representative is also part of a regional group which intends to lobby central government to effect changes which would help local authorities and their health partners meet their statutory obligations.

Evidencing that children in care undergo a timely dental check has also been an ongoing challenge, not least due to issues with recording the checks when they happen. This picture has improved somewhat at the time of writing, however, and all accommodation providers have been asked to provide dental check details for all children in their care. Carers have also been provided with a letter to show to dentists, highlighting that children in care should be treated as a priority.

Northamptonshire's specialist Looked After Children's Mental Health Team continues to provide vital care and guidance; nearly 300 children were open to the service in 2022. Through a Public Health project, the team has now recruited an advanced mental health specialist to work in the Trust's Leaving Care Team. Ongoing priorities for the ICB include further improving the timeliness of health assessments, undertaking a review to understand the needs of separated children and improving data-sharing practices with the Trust. The Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ) is a short behavioural and emotional screening questionnaire, which aims to provide information about a child's wellbeing. There have been challenges with the SDQ pathway in Northamptonshire and work has been undertaken with key partners to develop a new pathway and improve the SDQ process.

### Performance scorecard

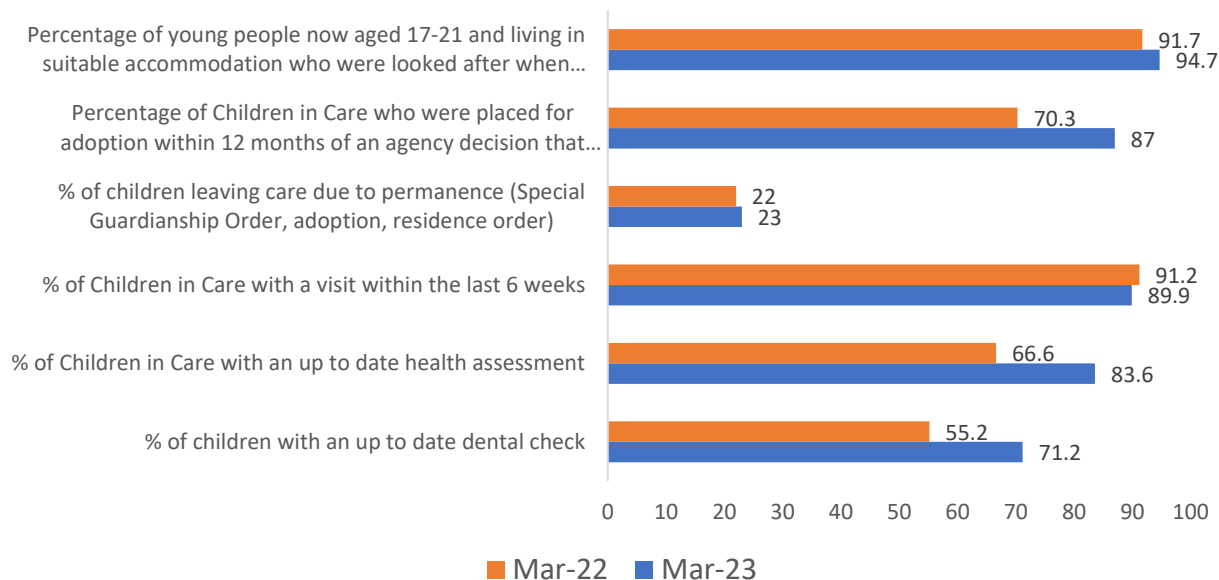
The Board reviews a performance scorecard at each meeting, providing an opportunity for dialogue, scrutiny and challenge between officers, partner agencies and elected members. Measures include some of the national metrics required by the DfE and the scorecard relates closely to the Trust's Improvement Plan. Measures are grouped under the following headings:

- General measures (such as population data, timeliness of statutory visits).
- Placements (proportion of children living out of county, placement stability measures).
- Adoption (timeliness of placements, number of orders granted).
- Care Leavers (accommodation, employment and training measures).
- Education (education plan timeliness and quality, exclusions).

Discussions focussed heavily on health assessment performance, with a specific agenda item on this topic coming to Board in January. However, the scorecard has been used throughout the year as a starting point for scrutiny of the Trust's and its partners' performance in many areas.

Often, this scrutiny has furthered members’ understanding of a child’s journey through care. For example, while scorecard averages may suggest that children wait too long to be adopted after an adoption order is made by the courts, this may disguise a very positive journey for individual children towards being adopted by a family that is perfect for them.

**Performance Scorecard: Selected Mar 2022/Mar 2023 comparison data.**



**Thematic and ad-hoc reports**

At every meeting, the Board focusses on a particular topic of relevance to care-experienced children and young people, informed by the NCT’s priorities and Improvement Plan, and feedback from young people themselves. Young people, NCT officers and partner agencies are often invited to contribute. Items may also be added to future agendas as a result of discussions held in Board.

The following provides a summary of the topics discussed at Board during the year.

**Sufficiency update.**

In recent years the population of children in care has risen markedly, placing a strain on the sufficiency of foster care placements across the country. The needs of children have also become increasingly complex, requiring carers with the specialist skills needed to meet such children’s needs. While they have reduced consistently over the last five years, the number of crisis and emergency placement requests remains a challenge.

In Northamptonshire, a high proportion of residential and fostering placements are provided by third party agencies such as Independent Fostering Agencies, which are Ofsted regulated. For older young people, Independent Supported Accommodation providers are often a very beneficial step on the



journey to independence. These providers are not regulated by Ofsted, but are required to abide by the Trust's framework agreement and will soon be required to abide by a national set of standards.

The Trust undertakes a range of activity to ensure that third party providers are meeting the needs of children in their care. This includes block-purchasing agreements, quality assurance visits and provider events. Around a quarter of our children in care live in placements outside the county.

While this can be due to a lack of an available placement in-county, it is often the most appropriate solution for the child's needs.

The Sufficiency Action Plan is geared to improving our sufficiency of homes for children in care. The plan includes commissioning two new emergency children's homes, a review of the leaving care accommodation offer, exploring new block placement contracts and working closely with partners to overcome challenges in the sufficiency market. An external review of our placement service found that we have a good understanding of our challenges, but there is much work to do.

The Placement Management Service receives many same-day placement requests, coming in peaks and troughs. Sometimes these cannot be fulfilled in-house, so the young person may move to an unregulated setting, which are subject to close managerial scrutiny. Such requests may be due to placement breakdowns and so encouraging placement stability has been a strong area of focus. Wrap-around support within the community can promote placement stability, an area for which elected councillors are in a unique position to help.

Board was also challenged to consider and drive the means of reducing the need for a such a high level of placement sufficiency in the first place. This would effectively mean reducing the number of children who are in care unnecessarily. This will be achieved through strengthened early help for families, high quality social work and edge of care services.

### **Services for Young People Leaving Care.**

The Leaving Care Team, with the help of some enthusiastic (and somewhat raucous) care-experienced young people, shared with the Board activities in four areas: the Local Offer to Care Leavers, council tax exemptions, the new Accommodation Panel and the Independent Living Programme.

The Local Offer is a publication which sets out the services available to children moving from care to independence, including services available from partner agencies. The offer includes the provisions required by statute, such as a £2000 setting up home allowance. Northamptonshire young people also have access to a mental health professional within the Leaving Care Service, free halls of residence accommodation through the University of Northampton, council tax exemptions, and drop-in clinics with partner organisations such as housing services.

Consulting with young people themselves is a vital part of developing the offer, and young people have told us what they would like to see, such as improved access to leisure services and travel discounts. Young people spoke very positively about the support they receive from their personal adviser. At the time of Board an event was being planned to bring together national and local businesses, to challenge them to offer employment and other opportunities for our young people. The Leaving Care Team is now working to exploit the wide range of opportunities resulting from the successful event.

The Trust employs two care-experienced Apprentice Champions in the Leaving Care Service. They spoke powerfully about council tax exemptions for care leavers, and how the exemptions currently offered by the west and north councils vary, creating something of a 'postcode lottery.' Elected members themselves were challenged to take the issue up with their respective councils.

A new multi-agency panel has been set up which considers, on an individual basis, the accommodation and other needs of young people transitioning to independence. Housing services, adult social services and Prospects (a service which helps young people into work and training) are regular members, and the panel considers around twenty cases a month. This can include young people referred to the panel due to specific concerns. Typical actions resulting from the panel include helping remove barriers to housing applications being made, expediting referrals to adult services, and offering practical advice to personal advisers and social workers.

The Independent Living Programme runs over four days and helps young people gain the skills they need for moving on to independence. Board held a live question and answer session with a group of young people who had attended the programme. They had learnt a lot about topics such as budgeting, cooking, substance misuse and sexual health. While they feared the programme would rather drag, it was in the event very enjoyable, with some participants overcoming their shyness and making new friends. One young person was excited because the course had facilitated and prepared her for moving into a training flat. When asked what advice they would give other young people thinking of doing the course, they said 'Just do it, it's fun!'

#### **National Safeguarding Review: Children with Disabilities.**

In October 2022 the DfE's Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published a review into very serious abuse to a number of children with disabilities and complex needs at three residential special schools in Doncaster. The panel chair wrote to all Directors of Children's Services in England requesting that reviews were undertaken in respect of disabled children living in residential settings. The Trust completed the review and reported its findings to Board.

The Trust identified five such children and undertook extensive work to look at their arrangements and needs. This entailed liaising with parents, social workers and commissioners, and understanding the voice of the children themselves. The report to Board confirmed that in each case, arrangements

were as they should be, although capturing data around Educational and Health Care plans and using it effectively was identified as an area for development. The process also involved looking at each of the establishments and ensuring there were no concerns or required actions; again, the outcome was satisfactory.

As well as the Corporate Parenting Board and the Local Safeguarding Partnership, the results of the process were submitted to the national panel overseeing the review, and to the regional DfE. The Trust has chosen to repeat the exercise every six months.

### **Care-experienced people and youth justice.**

Colleagues from Northamptonshire's Youth Offending Service (YOS) presented a detailed report to Board about care-experienced young people's involvement in the youth justice system, prompting lively debate among members.

Between June 2022 and January 2023, the proportion of YOS cases who were care-experienced rose from 15% to 16.3%. The proportion of first-time offenders who were care-experienced had fallen, due in part to the relatively new multi-agency Protocol for Reducing the Criminalisation of Children in Care and Care Leavers. However, the dip seen in reoffending rates for older teenagers was unfortunately not reflected among care-experienced young people.

There was no strong correlation between living in a residential setting and offending; young people who offend come from a variety of placement types, but notably, repeat offenders who are care-experienced have often undergone multiple changes of placement. A late entry to care is also a factor. Unsurprisingly, offending rates were closely aligned with deprived areas.

The YOS liaises closely with the courts, social workers and residential homes, to give guidance on how to communicate with young people. This involves understanding behavioural triggers and levels of risk, and management plans for dealing with incidents. Many offending young people from residential homes have been the victim of some form of exploitation; they are often faced with weighing the perceived risks from both the law, and criminal gangs. Often, they are more concerned with the wellbeing of their family than their own. A multi-agency approach is vital if these risks are to be mitigated.

A new multi-agency Out of Court Disposal Panel has been created. This means that for every young person who comes to YOS with some form of criminal outcome, a decision is made as to whether an out of court disposal is feasible. The new Turnaround project is also in place and helping to share responsibility for these young people more evenly across agencies. As a result, there are more Outcomes 22s, which is when the police decide to defer prosecution to allow an opportunity for the accused to engage with intervention activity.

### 3. Young People's Participation and Successes

Officers and elected members try hard to include young people in the Board's functioning, whether by inviting them to attend in person or provide materials such as videos or artwork. Materials prepared for the Board are written in a young person-friendly format wherever possible. The Board liaises closely with the participation groups: the Children in Care Council, the Care Leavers' Council, and the Shooting Stars group for young people with special educational needs or disabilities. Children and Young people's contribution is evidenced in many of the reports and presentations which come to Board, the IRO Annual Report for example, which includes feedback from young people and a special version of the report written directly to them.

While there is work to do, young people contributed significantly to the Board during 2022-23. One particularly welcome development was the recruitment of a care-experienced young person as a full member. As detailed above, young people presented their views to the Board about the benefits of the Independent Living Programme, issues around council tax exemptions, and their hopes for the Local Offer to Care Leavers.

#### Celebrating children and young people

Like any good parent, the Corporate Parenting Board celebrates the achievements of children. Every meeting includes a slot in which anonymised stories of children and young people's successes are shared, and all receive a certificate and shopping voucher in recognition. These achievements have included high-level accomplishments such as having written work published or securing first class degrees. But the Board also celebrates those ostensibly small steps, which add up to significant progress. This has included achievements as simple as being able to attend school regularly or engage with a social worker.

After a pandemic-induced hiatus, the Awards and Celebration Event for Children in Care returned in a big way in July 2022 and was a roaring success.



Over 400 nominations were received for children in four categories: Determined to Learn, Making a Difference, Aspirational Star, and Super Skills. Every nominee received a letter and certificate, personally signed by the Trust CEO Colin Foster. The event was held at Fernie Fields Sports Field in Moulton, Northampton, and was well-attended by children, foster carers and family members. Ample support was provided by a small army of volunteers, including members of our fantastic young people's participation groups who created a fantastic balloon arch. Both lead members from Board attended and were delighted to meet so many of our amazing children and young people. As well as the awards ceremony itself, events included a climbing wall, animal experience, live DJ, archery, football and a chill-out tent.



## 4. Corporate Parenting Board Diagnostic

A Local Government Association (LGA) team carried out a diagnostic exercise between 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2023, and fed its findings back to the Board in the same month. The LGA took the role of ‘critical friend’ and met with many of the members and officers who attend Board. The diagnostic considered the following themes:

- Governance and Board effectiveness.
- Appreciation of impact, including data and performance.
- The voice and influence of care-experienced children and young people.
- Ownership by the councils and the Trust.
- Health and wellbeing of children in care and care leavers.
- Aspiration and achievement.
- Quality, planning stability and permanence (sufficiency).

Additionally, the team considered the effectiveness of the current Board arrangements in improving outcomes for children and young people, and how best to deliver the Board’s functions in the future. The Trust’s Young Inspectors team was heavily involved, and interviewed the lead members and service managers in the corporate parenting service. In their feedback, they said they would like more young people on the Board, and a stronger method by which the Board hears and understands the voices of young children. Members should be more experienced at working with children, the Young Inspectors said, and the celebration of young people’s achievements should be expanded. They also felt that documents for Board should be more accessible.

What follows are highlights from the LGA team’s feedback to the board.

### Strengths

Trust officers demonstrated a strong commitment to an effective Board, and aspirations for children and young people. Both lead members were similarly committed, and other members had shown a desire to challenge the Trust for the benefit of children and young people. There existed a strong partnership with health colleagues and a commitment to make improvements in that area, and as a general point, the Virtual School was highlighted as a strength. Documents presented to the Board were of good quality and the Terms of Reference were clear. The team welcomed the celebration of young people’s successes at every Board meeting, although this could include more of the ‘small steps’ type of progress that are very important to children.

### Areas for consideration and opportunities

The diagnostic concluded that the diverging ambitions of the west and north councils was an issue to be resolved. The team also could not firmly evidence that all members of the board had a sound understanding of the meaning of being an effective corporate parent. Mirroring the view of the

Young Inspectors, the team noted room for much greater participation and engagement with children and young people themselves, as well as foster carers and third-party organisations. Opportunities to learn from organisations such as the LGA should be taken. Similarly, there was the opportunity for closer links with other board structures, such as the Joint Commissioning Board.

### Risks

A desire for structural changes could, the team concluded, take energy away from focussing on children's outcomes; while bringing benefits, separate boards could increase the resource burden on Trust officers and other partner members. As young people themselves have noted, the two councils have increasingly divergent offers for care-experienced young people, for example in housing and council tax. Some members have demonstrated a lack of commitment to the Board through their poor attendance of meetings.

### What next?

The LGA team suggested that the Board would benefit from its members being united in terms of their understanding of corporate parenting. LGA workshops could help in this regard, as could an understanding of how to use data effectively. The overall governance of the Board needed to be strengthened; regional groups and other authorities' boards could prove instructive. Notably, the LGA suggested that members should actively engage with children and young people outside of the meeting arena, to better understand their journey and experiences.

The Board welcomed the findings of the diagnostic, and agreed it was a valuable exercise. As noted earlier, both councils have since agreed to set up their own individual boards, to be facilitated by their respective democratic services teams.

## 5. NCT's Improvement Plan: Progress

Northamptonshire Children's Services had its standard Ofsted ILACS inspection in September and October 2022 and are now rated as 'Requires Improvement to be Good'. The journey to improve outcomes for children, young people and families in Northamptonshire is captured in the ongoing Improvement Plan. The following highlights some developments, as of May 2023, most relevant to children in care, under the headings of the Plan's six overarching priorities. Details of 'what good looks like' is listed under each priority.

## 1. Excellent leadership

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*Children's experiences and outcomes are improved as a result of consistently good quality management oversight and supervision. Sufficient resources are allocated and managed to enable effective delivery of NCT services.*

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Performance clinics within the corporate parenting service now have a much greater focus on quality assurance, supervision and oversight. In the last quarter of 2022-23, IROs noted improvements in the management oversight within care plans, case recording and assessments. A new model of performance clinics and quality assurance for Independent Fostering Agencies is now in place. Unregistered foster placements for children in care are now reviewed on a weekly basis by senior managers. Budget forecasts for placements have been reviewed, to reflect local and national pressures. The Trust has also contributed to the DfE consultation around the social care workforce.

## 2. Recruit, retain and develop an awesome workforce

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*Children are supported by consistent practitioners who have the capacity and skills to develop effective relationships and undertake good quality work with them. Children and families receive an appropriate response in an emergency out of hours.*

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Social worker vacancies across the Trust have reduced from 17.1% in 2022 to 16.4% in March 2023. 12 Newly Qualified Social Workers started with the Trust in May 2023, with 13 due to start in September. A case management system for the Trust's fostering service is in the procurement stage. Through the annual social work health check, practitioners have reported that their workload is manageable and that they are well supported.

## 3. Strong relationship-based practice

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*Children and families receive the right specialist and timely response that meets their needs and improves their outcomes. Children are well cared for in a permanent and safe home at the earliest opportunity. Care leavers have access to support that meets their needs and improves their outcomes.*

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With a number of other authorities, the Trust joined the Valuing Care project, supported by Impower. This commenced in February 2023, and seeks to help the Trust get the right resources to children in care who need them. This will promote the Trust's ability to show how we are improving children's life chances, particularly in terms of making sure they have a permanent home and avoid entering care where alternative options are viable. As of May 2023, 78% of Valuing Care assessments had been completed for the identified cohort of children.

As detailed elsewhere in this report, processes around health assessments have been strengthened, with a resulting increase in the number of children receiving a timely assessment. The quality of assessments remains high according to quality assurance checks. Pathways around Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) are being reviewed and strengthened.

Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings have now been embedded in Leaving Care, Children in Care and Disabled Children's Teams, leading to better collaborative working between professionals.

Across the Trust, good and outstanding practice is more routinely seen, shared and celebrated.

The Trust aims to reduce the number of children entering care unnecessarily. To this end, weekly review meetings are taking place with the police regarding children being police-protected, with alternative options being explored. A new Strategic Manager now oversees case progression for children at risk of entering care, and family network meetings are being undertaken more routinely. The average length of court proceedings for children reduced from 67 weeks in June 2022, to 47 in January 2023 and the Valuing Care project identified 27 children who could potentially return to their families' care.

The Trust's Permanence Tracking Panel takes place twice a month (once for each council). On a case-by-case basis, it considers how best to remove barriers to children achieving permanence, whether that means returning to their family, a long-term foster placement or other arrangement. Children in care often need help understanding their past and present, in order to thrive in the future. Their wishes and feelings are expected to be integral to all assessments and ongoing work, and a dynamic model for life story work is being embedded.

As mentioned earlier, exciting developments to the Local Offer to Care Leavers are underway, with increased apprenticeship opportunities, social activities and mentoring. The new Accommodation and Transitions panel operates in close partnership with housing services in each council, adult social services, and Prospects. It considers how best to help young people make a successful transition to independence, while also achieving best value for the Trust. Russell House in Northampton remains a valuable drop-in service for care leavers, and hosts clinics with partner organisations, such as Prospects. There is a need for a similar resource in the north of the county.

#### 4. Insightful quality assurance and learning

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*Children's outcomes and experiences are improved as a result of improving practice.*

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IROs are using a thematic approach to escalating concerns around practice. By the latest measure, 50% of their escalations are resolved within one working day, 70% within five working days. Ten children in care teams had no escalations raised in the last quarter of 2022-23. 72% of children who had a statutory looked after child review in March 2023 had a care plan completed within 3 working days prior to the review taking place. This compares to 62% completed when a similar exercise was undertaken in June 2022.

#### 5. Healthy Partnerships that improve outcomes for children

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*Risks for children who are experiencing contextual vulnerabilities are effectively managed and the impact on them is minimised. Children and Families in need of additional help receive the right support at the right time which makes a difference to their lives. Children with additional and complex needs receive the right support at the right time which makes a difference to their lives. Children in care and care leavers reach their potential in terms of educational attainment.*

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Better early help for families means better outcomes for children, and a reduced likelihood of entering the care system. A new Early Help Strategy is in development, with a focus on partnerships and practice. North Northamptonshire is in the process of commissioning the Early Parenting Pilot, through localised family hubs.

A number of developments are underway to help children in care and care leavers achieve their educational potential. The Virtual School continues to quality assure every Personal Education Plan, and meets quarterly with strategic leads in education and social care. A new tracking system to monitor children's educational progress has been developed.

As of May, 64.4% of Northamptonshire care leavers are in some form of educational, employment or training. While the Trust aims to drive this figure further upward, it is already consistently above the national care leaver average. Two paid work experience positions have been secured through the Valuing Care project, and a host of similar opportunities have opened up through the engagement event with local businesses, hosted by the Trust. Care-experience is not a 'protected characteristic'

under UK equality law (there is an argument that it should be), but regardless, the Trust and the two councils now have a ring-fenced interview process in place for care leavers applying for jobs.

## 6. Effective use of resources

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*NCT commissioning and performance management has the best possible impact on outcomes for children. Children in care are cared for in a home which meets their needs and improves their outcomes. Older teenagers receive the right support and accommodation to meet their needs and help transition into adulthood.*

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Recommendations from an external review of the Trust's commissioning, quality assurance, performance management and assurance arrangements are being considered. This will be critical in improving outcomes for children and young people, as well as value for money for the Trust.

The Sufficiency Strategy and Action Plan is helping to improve short term placement stability, measured by determining the proportion of children three or more placement moves in a rolling twelve-month period; this figure decreased from 11.9% in October 2022, to 11% in January 2023. Unregistered placements are closely monitored and have reduced from 27 in September 2022 to 22 in April 2023.

New processes are in place to promote the retention of our foster carers, with retention meetings taking place at the earliest opportunity when foster carers raise concerns, and the continued promotion of the resilience carer scheme. Through the Circle to Success project, engagement work is taking place with external Independent Foster Agencies and providers of Independent Supported Accommodation and residential provision. This remains in its early stages but has led to new recruitment initiatives for foster places for children with disabilities.

A new residential home for children with complex needs has partially opened, with another due to open soon. Similarly to our provision at Belinda Ferrison House in Northampton, a new YMCA-run suite of training flats is due to open in summer 2023.

As detailed elsewhere in this report, the new Accommodation and Transitions Panel is helping professionals to coordinate support for young people moving towards independence. An action plan for 16 and 17-year-olds at risk of homelessness is now in place.

## Appendix 1: Four Priorities

The NCT Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-25 sets out four key priorities. This appendix sets out progress against the specific criteria under each priority.

### Priority 1: Live safe, be safe

**Key service areas and strategies :** Sufficiency Strategy, Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Strategy, Commissioning Strategy

How we achieve this	Key Success Criteria	Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will work with communities, businesses and partner agencies to recruit more foster placements to meet the needs of the looked after children cohort and increase placement choices.</li> <li>• If a child or young person has to move from where they are living, we will involve them in the decision making as much as possible and give them an information profile of the placement they are moving to.</li> <li>• If possible, we will keep our children who are looked after with their brother and sisters when they come into care.</li> <li>• Families and friends are always considered in the planning process and our children are placed with family and friends in instances where it is safe to do so.</li> <li>• We will improve choice and quality of accommodation and support for older young people in care and care leavers.</li> <li>• We will offer support to care leavers moving to independence to maintain tenancies.</li> <li>• We will continue to develop clear service pathways for children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) supported by a multi-agency process.</li> <li>• We will continue to ensure that all children and young people who go missing receive return interviews, a completed risk assessment and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase sufficiency of local placements to increase choice for children in care.</li> <li>• Increase in the number of children in foster placements who turn 18 and stay put in their placement.</li> <li>• Reduction in the number of children in care with 3+ placement moves.</li> <li>• Reduction in the number of children returning to care within one year of previous period of care.</li> <li>• Increase in the number of children in care in longterm placements (fostering).</li> <li>• Percentage of children in care during the year who were placed within 12m of the decision (adoption).</li> <li>• Reduction in number of missing episodes for looked after children and increase in number of independent return home interviews.</li> <li>• Reduction in number of looked after children who are first time entrants to criminal justice system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short term placement stability improved from 11.9% (Oct 2022) to 11% (March 2023).</li> <li>• New emergency / complex needs children’s home partially opened, another due to open June 2023.</li> <li>• 32 young people live in Staying Put arrangements as of June 2023; a new, clearer staying put agreement has been launched.</li> <li>• Between March 2022 and March 2023, the percentage of children with 3 or more placement moves in 12 months dropped from 12.7% to 11%. It dropped further to 10.6% in June 2023.</li> <li>• The proportion of children who enter care within 12 months of a previous care episode dropped from 10% to 6% between March 2022 and March 2023.</li> <li>• For 2022-23, 70.3% of children for whom the agency decision was adoption, were placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision. This is a slight decrease from 72% the previous year, however the latest quarterly figure for this metric is 77.8%.</li> <li>• For children who go missing, 99% of return interviews were completed, although children’s participation in these has reduced from 71% to 62% over the year.</li> <li>• Between January 2021 and June 2022 15% of first entrants to the criminal justice system were children in care. For the period 1<sup>st</sup></li> </ul>

<p>timely management of identified risks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will further develop a multiagency response to serious youth violence enabling early identification of young people.</li> </ul>		<p>April to 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022, this proportion fell to 11.3%.</p>
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## Priority 2: Fulfil potential

**Key service areas and strategies:** Virtual School, SEND Strategy and Transformation Programme, Care Leavers Strategy.

How we achieve this	Key Success Criteria	Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational needs or requirements of the child will be considered at the outset of any placement.</li> <li>• We will support our children with education, training and employment options to help them achieve the best they can.</li> <li>• Children who need to change schools will be allocated a new school place without delay.</li> <li>• Children with additional needs will be supported to have appropriate provision so they can achieve their potential.</li> <li>• All children will have a Personal Education Plan (PEP).</li> <li>• Young people leaving care will be encouraged and supported with accessing further and higher education and training opportunities including apprenticeships.</li> <li>• We will increase apprenticeships, work experience and training opportunities across the councils, partners and the private sector.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All looked after children will have an up-to-date PEP supported by daily monitoring calls to each school where a child attends to ensure attendance.</li> <li>• Improvement in educational attainment of children.</li> <li>• Increase in proportion of care leavers in education, employment and training.</li> <li>• Reduction in number of children without a school place.</li> <li>• Increase in care leavers undertaking apprenticeships and other opportunities in the Trust and councils.</li> <li>• EHC Plans for children are reviewed annually and quality assurance demonstrates plans are of good quality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every PEP is quality assured by the Virtual School, with a compliance figure of around 97% to 98% for the two council areas. 79% were rated Good for the secondary school cohort for 2021-22.</li> <li>• At Key Stage 1 in academic year 2021/22, 23% of NNC children care achieved the expected levels in reading, writing and maths. This figure was 10% for WNC children in care.</li> <li>• The Progress 8 score for Key Stage 4 for NNC was -1.41 (-0.11 difference to national figure). For WNC, the figure was -0.78 (+0.52 difference with national figure).</li> <li>• Meaningful year-on-year comparative data around educational attainment are unavailable due to the pandemic.</li> <li>• Around a quarter of the school age children in care have an EHC Plan, and all their PEPs are quality assured by the Virtual School.</li> <li>• Virtual School continues to work closely with schools to reduce exclusions.</li> <li>• Any children not on school roll are supported by the VS to access the right provision for them, including tutoring.</li> <li>• There have been 6 apprenticeships in the Trust over the last 2 years, including our Care-Experienced Apprentice Champions.</li> <li>• The proportion of care leavers in</li> </ul>

		<p>education, employment or training remains stable at around 62%, and above national averages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prospects NEET service holds weekly drop-in sessions for care leavers.</li> <li>• Local Offer event with businesses and partners has led to increased opportunities for care leavers in terms of education, employment and training, including apprenticeships</li> </ul>
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### Priority 3: Develop resilience

**Key service areas and strategies:** Reunification Policy, Workforce Development Strategy, Joint Housing Protocol, Participation Strategy.

How we achieve this	Key Success Criteria	Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will help our children to learn about who they are as well as the important events in their lives.</li> <li>• We will make sure all necessary information and paperwork is obtained in a timely way such as passport, birth certificate and national insurance number.</li> <li>• We will promote family time between children, young people and their families in a way that enables them to have positive relationships with the people who are important to them where this is safe.</li> <li>• We will support children to reconnect with family and other trusted adults in a safe and to learn about their family history.</li> <li>• We will work with children and families to ensure there is effective support in place to support and maintain a return home.</li> <li>• We will continue to build positive relationships with our children and never give up on them.</li> <li>• We will ensure children have a variety of means to express any concerns they may have and that these are acted on promptly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in children moving out of care and number of children returning home.</li> <li>• Proportion of visits to children in timescale.</li> <li>• Increase in percentage of permanent social workers in the corporate parenting service.</li> <li>• Increased number of children engaging in Children in Care Council and participation events.</li> <li>• Feedback from children and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Between March 22 and March 23, the proportion of children leaving care due to permanence fell slightly from 22% to 19%. However, the permanence tracking panel is now driving permanence for children at the earliest possible stage. Also note that for some children residential care is the best option until adulthood, and these are not reflected in permanence figures.</li> <li>• Around 84% of children receive a visit within 6 weeks, a dip from 91% the previous year.</li> <li>• Between March and May 2023, social work vacancy figures in the service fell from 16.7% to 15%.</li> <li>• Several hundred children received nominations and awards at large scale celebration events in 2022 and 2023. Feedback from 2022 was used to inform the 2023 event.</li> <li>• 139 children took part in Virtual School holiday activities.</li> <li>• Participation number for the Children in Care Council has remained stable at around 16; the group contributed a great deal to the celebration events.</li> <li>• New feedback mechanisms for children are in place and being developed, including the Mind of My Own app, development of the Trust's websites, a child-friendly complaints process, and the Young Inspectors group.</li> <li>• The Voice of the Child working group regularly feeds back to senior managers and boards.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will aim to keep changes for our children to a minimum.</li> <li>• We will make certain that we have a robust and active Children in Care Council who are able to influence and shape services.</li> <li>• We will offer support to care leavers moving to independence to maintain tenancies.</li> </ul>	<p>young people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As of June 2023, the Mind of My Own app is being relaunched with new features, including the ability for workers to respond to children directly through the app.</li> <li>• Care leavers continue to receive support in maintaining tenancies via the joint protocol with housing services, which includes regular meetings with housing services, and the Accommodation and Transitions Panel.</li> </ul>
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#### Priority 4: Enjoy good health and wellbeing

**Key service areas and strategies:** Integrated Care System, CCG Health of Looked After Children

#### Strategy

How we achieve this	Key Success Criteria	Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children receive appropriate, dedicated services within agreed timescales including access to health assessments, dental appointments and emotional health and wellbeing services.</li> <li>• We will give access to appropriate emotional and mental health support for looked after children when they need it.</li> <li>• We will support care leavers to achieve positive mental wellbeing and emotional resilience.</li> <li>• Children with complex needs and disabilities will have access to integrated services.</li> <li>• We will make sure our children who are looked after can access their health records and history.</li> <li>• We will develop support offers to foster carers including access to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).</li> <li>• We will help our children do the things that are important to them in terms of culture and religion.</li> <li>• Children will enjoy a smooth transition between children's services and adult social care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and young people identify themselves as health and happy.</li> <li>• % of children in care with Strengths and Difficulties (SDQ) scores.</li> <li>• Proportion of care leavers provided with a health passport.</li> <li>• Reduction of care-experienced young people who are street homeless or involved in offending behaviour.</li> <li>• Increased placement stability performance.</li> <li>• Number of children referred to MIAP aged 16.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-level oversight and scrutiny continues in respect of Health Assessments. Figures for initial assessments continue to fluctuate; 87% in December 2022, falling to 43% in March 2023. Review assessment figures remain stable around 67%, a rise from the 2021/22 average of 62%.</li> <li>• There have been challenges with the SDQ pathway in Northamptonshire and work has been undertaken with key partners to develop a new pathway and improve the SDQ process.</li> <li>• All children are provided a health passport at their final statutory review. They are also directed to the NHS mobile app.</li> <li>• Between June 2022 and January 2023, the proportion of YOS cases who were care-experienced rose from 15% to 16.3%. The proportion of first-time offenders who were care-experienced had fallen, due in part to the relatively new multi-agency Protocol for Reducing the Criminalisation of Children in Care and Care Leavers.</li> <li>• All young people at risk of homelessness are closely scrutinised at senior manager level. For a snapshot of June 29<sup>th</sup> 2023, there was one young person classified as No Fixed Abode, with 10 sofa surfing.</li> <li>• Between March 2022 and March 2023, the percentage of children with 3 or more placement moves in 12 months dropped from 12.7% to 11%. It dropped further to 10.6% in June 2023.</li> <li>• The Leaving Care Service now has a dedicated mental health specialist working in the team.</li> </ul>