

A brighter future

Community Parenting Strategy for Looked after Children and Care Leavers 2023-2026

Our commitment - A place where all care experienced children and young people belong and can build a successful future.

Sheffield City Council and Partners

Foreword

Councillor Dawn Dale – Chair of Education, Children and Families Policy Committee

I am passionate about making sure Sheffield 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 Sheffield's children and making Sheffield the best place to grow up in for a child.

In December 2023, Sheffield City Council decided it would treat "Care Experienced" as if it were a protected characteristic. I am extremely proud of Sheffield'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 to our children.

Kate Josephs – Chief Executive

Children and young people are at the heart of everything we do. I am proud that the key priority the Council plan is to work together to build a better, brighter future for Sheffield.

Our Strategy has been co-produced with care experience children and young people. It builds on our vision for children and young people as set out in Sheffield City Goals and the Council Plan 2024-2028 which commits us to be great "Community Parents". This strategy underpins our commitment to champion Sheffield's children and young people and to ensure they have every opportunity to live happy and fulfilling lives.

Meredith Dixon Teasdale – Strategic Director of Children’s Services (DCS), Sheffield City Council

I am delighted to introduce “A Brighter Future” - Sheffield Community Parenting Strategy 2023 – 2026. It sets out the city’s priorities for Care Experienced children and young people across the city.

Together we get things done. Our strategy will be delivered with support from key partners, voluntary and community organisations and businesses in the city. We must work together to ensure that all care experience children and young people can benefit from all the opportunities that the city has to offer. That they have the support and connections they need to grow up feeling safe, valued, heard, and knowing they belong here.

“A place where all care experience children and young people belong, and all young people can build a successful future”

Young Person’s Foreword

As care-experienced young people we like that you are using the Bright Spots voices from care-experienced children and young people.

As a team we have been involved in doing the Bright Spots research (promoting and taking part). We are using the Bright Spots research in all the work we do to ask professionals to improve and change the way we do things in Sheffield.

We are looking forward to working alongside you and partners to co-produce the plans and help you to identify the priorities.

We will be scrutinising your progress at our regular scrutiny panel meetings.

As Voice and Influence Workers we want to ensure that:

- All care-experienced children and young people know about community parenting and what it can do for them
- Care-experienced children and young people are able to attend Community Parenting Meetings

Introduction – Together we get things done

Welcome to the Sheffield's Community Parenting Strategy 2023-2026

'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 to ensure they have every opportunity to reach their full potential as they grow up in our family. In Sheffield we are committed to taking a citywide approach to improving outcomes for our children in care and our care leavers. Therefore, in our latest strategy we refer to Corporate Parenting as Community Parenting wherever applicable.

We are proud to have long-standing support from our key partners, voluntary and community organisations and businesses in the city. Together we have embraced the responsibility to act as extended community family to care experienced young people. This collective approach is really important as it allows us to be the best community parents, we can be for our care experienced children and young people.

This strategy is part of a broad range of activity that supports our shared aim to improve provision for our care experienced children and young people. The alignment of the Community Strategy with the Council Plan 2024 – 2028 and City Goals creates a shared understanding about our priorities and a whole-city approach to Community Parenting particularly Outcome 1 – **“A place where all children belong, and all young people can build a successful future”**. The Council Plan is rooted in the values of our organisation which firmly place people at the heart of everything that we do and plays a vital role in helping Sheffield to achieve its new City Goals.

The Community Parenting Strategy also works alongside the “Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2023 – 2025”

Our Children and Young Peoples Voices - Participation in Sheffield is a strength” Ofsted, 2023

We are committed to seeking the voices of care experienced children and young people, who are the experts in their experience. Their voice is at the heart of service design, delivery and evaluation, including democratic decision-making.

We will continue to listen, hear what is being said and take action to improve the lives of this group of children and young people. We are committed to feeding back to young people to ensure they know how their input has changed the way we support them.

We have lots of ways to make sure that we regularly hear the voice of children in care and care leavers. The Bright Spots programme supports us to listen to the children in care and care leavers about the things that are important to them. The surveys include some core well-being measures which can be used to compare the wellbeing of children in care and care leavers to the wellbeing of children and young people in the general population. This strategy is based around the findings of the 2023 Bright Spots survey.

In addition to the Bright Spots survey, we have a Sheffield Children’s Involvement Service who consistently support care experienced children and young people to have a voice as individuals in their own lives and as collective groups of care experienced children and young people in service planning, delivery and evaluation.

The Create and Change model includes opportunities for children in care and Care Leavers. The groups are:

- Little Children in Care Council (Little CiCC): ages 7 – 11,
- Children in Care Council (CiCC): ages 12 – 17
- Sheffield Care Leavers’ Union (SCLU): ages 18 – 25.
- Sheffield’s Voice and Influence Team consists of five care experienced workers employed by Sheffield City Council to creatively gather the views of other care experienced children and young people across the city. They represent these voices to ensure they are heard, and changes implemented at both a delivery and strategic level.
- Young People’s Reverse Scrutiny Panel consists of care experienced young people who hold managers to account for implementing responses to the Bright Spots findings.

Our Strategic Priorities

Bright Spots identify four areas called 'domains' that are important to children and young people, their well-being and progress. In Sheffield we have based our Community Parenting priorities around these domains so that we focus on children and young people's priorities and experience. We will then use children and young people's priorities and experience to develop policies and practices which support young people throughout their journey through care.

We have added a fifth priority which focusses on improving the experience of carers so they are best placed to provide a nurturing home.

Priority 1: **Relationships – the people in your life**

Priority 2: **High Aspirations and Resilience – parity of opportunity growing up**

Priority 3: **Rights – entitlements, voice and participation**

Priority 4: **Wellbeing and Recovery – being and feeling healthy and happy**

Priority 5: **Caring for those who care: Children and young people are nurtured by carers and workers who are well-resourced, valued and supported**

The strategy shows our strategic intent for care experienced children and young people.

A detailed annual Community Parenting business plan will be co-produced with our young people and widely consulted on through our community parenting governance structure and we will use this to implement our strategy and make sure that we are making an impact.

Priority 1 : Relationships

- **Feeling like I belong**
- **The people I love**

This includes voices relating to connections, trust and belonging.

Community and loving relationships are essential to good health and wellbeing. To develop well, children and young people need to be loved, supported and cared for within a family, and by the communities around them. They need to have opportunities to learn, to play, be active and build loving relationships and to develop their personal and social skills. They need to see themselves in the world around them and feel able to express themselves.

What we, as community parents, want for our children and young people

We will secure permanence and belonging for children. We will support and help strengthen the relationships that are important to children and help them stay connected to those that they love throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

We want to support children and young people to be able to develop and sustain positive and healthy relationships and support networks they need throughout and beyond their care journey with us.

Sheffield's children and young people see themselves, their histories, cultures and identities reflected in their city. Sheffield is a cohesive and diverse city and we want our children and young people to access and feel that they belong to communities and cultures and feel safe to express themselves.

What our children and young people are telling us?

The Brightspots survey identified several areas where children in Sheffield experience were doing significantly better than children in other LA's or the general population: - in relation to having trusted adults in their lives, feeling trusted, feeling settled and positive.

However, 10% of children and young people (4-17yrs) did not have at least one really good friend, compared to 3% of their peers in the general population. For care leavers this problem appears to be worsening. More care leavers (20%) did not have a really good friend compared to their peers (2%) in the general population and young people (13%) in Sheffield.

What's working well?

We have a Family time service that is child-centred in its approach to supporting connections between children and their birth families.

We have a Staying Connected programme with 3 broad objectives – working with foster carers in supporting family time, developing ways of 'natural' sibling contact at shared activities and supporting with extended family members.

Our Staying Close project for young people leaving residential care supports them to build resilience and feel a sense of belonging to the local community.

We have a highly regarded Independent Visitor Scheme which supports children and young people to develop a friendship with a trained adult and to enjoy activities together.

Priority Areas

Ensure that relationships are central to all our policies and procedures to support care-experienced children and young people as having meaningful relationships is central to good health and wellbeing.

Develop new interventions to tackle loneliness and isolation in adult life and support the development of loving relationships.

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.

Develop "Staying Connected action" plan to improve young people's experience of Family Time.

Develop a "Welcome to Sheffield" to support Young Refugees to feel they belong in Sheffield.

If we get it right, what will children and young people say?

I enjoy the right amount of positive time with my family and friends.

I have friends and I am involved in a range of leisure activities that I enjoy.

I feel like I belong to a community, I feel confident happy with myself.

Link to City Goals

A Sheffield of Thriving Communities and • A Connected Sheffield • A caring and diverse Sheffield • A Sheffield for all generations

Priority 2 : High Aspirations and Resilience – Education and Living independently

- **My school, education and employment**
- **My future - developing the skills I need for adult life**
- **My home**
- **What I enjoy**

This includes voices relating to stability, school, education, employment and living independently.

What we, as community parents, want for our children and young people

Our care experienced children and young people are well prepared for adulthood and independent living.

We will champion and support young people as they leave our care and start to live independently, doing everything we can to make sure they are set up for life.

We want all children and young people to fulfil their aspirations and potential. With schools, businesses, and other partners we will link education, skills, and business investment into career pathways for every neighbourhood, including using our weight as an anchor institution to grow apprenticeships in Sheffield.

Children and young people have the right care and support, at the right time and in the right place and can access high quality care within our city. Young people can live in areas they have a connection to and feel safe in.

What our children and young people are telling us?

The Brightspots survey identified several areas where children in Sheffield experience were doing significantly better than children in other local authorities – including being taught life skills, feeling positive about their future, feeling their lives were getting better, feeling safe where they lived, having fun at the weekends and their carers showed an interest in their education.

However, a higher percentage of young people reported they did not like school 13% (4-7yrs), 8% of children (8-11yrs), 32%(11-17yrs) did not like school compared to 13% of young people looked after in other local authorities.

Bullying in schools was reported to be an 46% of children (8-11yrs) and 24% of young people (11-17yrs) felt afraid of going to school because of bullying,

Digital connectivity 9% of 11-17yrs in Sheffield 12% of care leavers did not have access to the internet where they lived.

28% of Care Leavers reported that they were experiencing financial difficulties, limited budgets, debt and struggling to budget. compared to their peers (9%) in the general population, and care leavers (20%) nationally. 48% of care leavers in Sheffield indicated that they were not in education, training or employment; 37% greater than their peers in the general population.

Priority Areas

All young people should have internet access to support education, connections and access to information.

Hold high aspirations and close the attainment gap for children in care. Increase the proportion of care leavers in education, training and employment.

Investigate the high levels of reported bullying and unhappiness with school and create an action plan from the findings.

Start preparation for independence and develop effective support networks earlier, alongside a strong focus on progression constantly monitoring and promoting young peoples progress.

Develop clear procedure in relation to Council Tax payments and exemptions to prevent Care Leaver developing avoidable debt.

If we get it right, what will children and young people say?

I like my school, I feel safe, I have high aspirations for my future and the support I need to achieve my dreams.

I am confident I can manage living independently, I have a good support network if I need a bit of help.

I am working and I earn enough to pay my bills and enjoy a good social life,

I have some choice in where I live and the type of accommodation, I live in. It feels like home, and I feel safe where I live.

City Goals - A creative and entrepreneurial Sheffield -A Sheffield for all generations'

Priority 3: Rights - entitlements, voice and participation

In this section we are talking about...

- **My rights and entitlements**
- **A sense of self and a voice in my care**
- **Feeling safe**

This includes voices relating to what I'm entitled to, having my voice heard and acted on and my right to be safe.

What we, as community parents, want for our children and young people

Children and young people in our care are routinely engaged, have a real say in their own lives and we always consult them about changes to services and support.

Young people in our care are informed of their rights, entitlements and have access to advocacy to ensure they receive them.

Children and young people feel safe in their home, in their school and in their communities. They feel safe from stigma and discrimination and feel confident about who they could speak to if they have worries.

Children and young people are encouraged to consider becoming involved in our Create and Change groups and other participation opportunities for peer support and friendships.

What our children and young people are telling us?

25% of young people reported that they did not have a say in the decisions made about their life compared to 14% of young people in other Local Authorities. Children and young people want access to an independent advocate who can help them make their voice heard or make complaints, and they would timely, age-appropriate responses.

They want to feel safe and free from stigma and discrimination.

Young people with low well-being tended to report feeling unhappy with being in care. They reported that adults did things that made them feel embarrassed about being in care, and they did not feel included in the decisions made about their lives.

Children and young people don't want to face stigma or discrimination in their lives because of their care status.

What's working well?

We have a 'child-focused, stable, consistent and skilled workforce, who share senior leaders' commitment to supporting children to remain living within their family network if possible' (Ofsted, 2023)

Training and resources are well developed and delivered to support young people understand their plans and have their voices heard and acted upon.

Children and young people benefit from the support of a strong well trained children's involvement team, including independent visitors, advocacy and a range of groups. Their views inform service development and delivery.

Priority Areas

Develop a clear communication strategy to ensure all care experienced children and young people are kept informed of entitlements, events, opportunities, activities and how to get additional support if required.

Make sure that the language that is used in relation to care experience young people by professionals reduces stigma and promotes respect.

We will have a dedicated co-production strategy for care experience children and young people so that they have a defined role in designing, developing and commissioning services.

We will ensure that young people feel more involved in decisions made about their lives at every opportunity.

We will improve processes for listening to young peoples experiences particularly if they have been "missing" from care.

If we get it right, what will children and young people say?

I feel respected, safe, listened to and valued.

City Goals • A caring and diverse Sheffield • A Sheffield for all generations

Priority 4: Recovery and Wellbeing – being and feeling healthy and happy

Feeling physically and emotionally healthy

Children and young people understanding their care journey have a strong sense of self.

This includes voices relating to feeling like I matter, that people care about what I think and feel.

What we, as community parents, want for our children and young people

Sheffield is a diverse city, this is reflected in the children in our care, and we recognise the responsibility we hold to ensure that children to understand their history and their care journey.

We want our children to have the opportunity to get involved in things that matter to them to be healthy and active, and to be supported in their friendships.

Children should receive timely access to assessments and support their recovery for the care and pre-care experiences.

What our children and young people are telling us?

Brightspots survey identified considerably higher number Sheffield young people reported that they had the same social worker for over a year, that knew and trusted their social worker and had they believed their carers noticed how they were feeling.

A significantly high percentage of children understand why they are in care compared to children in other local authorities.

86% of young people in Sheffield were happy with their appearance.

5 children under 11 and 9 over 11 reported feeling slightly unhappy.

A higher number of Care Leavers in Sheffield reported high anxiety, feeling life things they did were not worthwhile, low life satisfaction and low levels of happiness than their peers and the general population.

Priority Areas

Improved access and timely access to support for emotional health for care experience young people.

Improved and early support to plan for fulfilling adult lives.

Work with local businesses, partners and third sector organisations to enhance opportunities leisure, social and health activities for care experience children and young people.

If we get it right, what will children and young people say -

I am feeling positive about my life, it has purpose and I have the support I need to recover from my care journey.

I have an opportunity to try new activities, meet new friends develop new skills and feel confident and healthy.

City Goals • A creative and entrepreneurial Sheffield • A Sheffield for all generations • A Sheffield of Thriving Communities

Priority 5: Caring for those who care: Children and young people are nurtured by carers and workers who are well-resourced, valued and supported.

What we, as community parents, want for our children and young people

Children and young people are nurtured by carers and workers who are well-resourced, valued and supported.

Carers feel supported and skilled to provide stability for young people manage through difficult times.

What our children and young people are telling us?

Sheffield children tell us they want “a stable home, built in love” in Sheffield where they feel they belong and can maintain connections with schools, clubs, friends, family and significant people.

Priority Areas

We will ensure that Sheffield City Council creates the best environment for carers to provide care and support to looked after children and care leavers so that people want to foster for Sheffield

We will provide opportunities for connection, belonging and support for children, young people, carers. We will run a programme of social events, refresh our training offer and review the “mockingbird programme” to see what areas of good practice could shared with the wider fostering community.

We will recognise and reward family-based carers for the important work they do; through reviewing our allowances and fees structure to ensure equity and fairness.

Work across the city with partners, local business, voluntary, community and promote a fostering friendly city and to demonstrate our value and appreciation to all our staff and carers across the city.

We will have a dedicated co-production strategy for carers so that they have a defined role in designing, developing and commissioning services including the wider representation of the whole provider sector.

If we get it right, what will children and young people say?

I feel like I belong, I am happy, connected and have a strong support network to help me succeed in adult life.

City Goals • A caring and diverse Sheffield • A Sheffield for all generations

Accountability and Governance

In order to implement and deliver our strategy we have structures in place to monitor impact against the principles of the strategy, the processes that we have identified that we need to change, and performance against a range of agreed indicators. This will be monitored at the following strategic boards:

- Sheffield Community Parenting Board
- Sheffield Young People's Reverse Scrutiny Panel
- Children Young People and Family Support Scrutiny Committee

To make sure that we continue to listen to what our children and young people say will measure our progress against both our objectives by monitoring key performance data reported regularly to Community Parenting Board and through the feedback we receive from our children in care and care leavers about their experiences.

How will we implement the strategy?

Annual community parenting business plan, which clearly sets out clear annual priorities and measures is co-produced with Reverse Scrutiny Committee

Lead Officers and Members of Priority Groups are identified and take responsibility for their priority actions and report progress regularly to Reverse Scrutiny Panel

Reverse Scrutiny Committee provide feedback to Corporate Parenting Board in relation to progress and escalate any delay or challenges. Corporate Parenting Board to agree a Forward Plan for detailed updates.

Plans are refined and refreshed on an annual basis in collaboration with corporate parenting board and wider care experience population.

Appendix 1 - This strategy is part of a broad range of local and national activity that supports our shared aim to improve provision for children in care and care leavers including:

- Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Section 1) sets out seven corporate parenting principles which local authorities must have regard to for children looked after or care experienced young people.
- In February 2018 some DFE guidance for local authorities called 'Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care experienced young people' was published'.
- The Independent Review of Children's Social Care was published in May 2022. The review examined the needs, experiences and outcomes of the children supported by social care and put forward recommendations for changes.
- In December 2022 Ofsted announced the introduction of a new judgement for care experienced young people to the framework for inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS). The new judgement will focus on experiences and progress of care experienced young people. This will include consideration of whether local authorities are making good decisions for care experienced young people, and what they are doing to support them into adulthood.
- In February 2023 the UK government published its implementation strategy and consultation called 'Stable Homes, Built on Love'. The strategy responded to the independent review and concentrated on how to provide nurturing, stable and loving homes for children in care and care experienced young people.

Local Context

- A multi-agency Corporate Parenting Board chaired by the Cllr Dawn Dale.
- Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2023 – 2025
- The council's overarching Council Plan 2024 – 2028 particularly Outcome 1 – "A place where all children belong, and all young people can build a successful future". Our Values and City Goals
 - A range of Children Involvement activities to ensure that the voices of young people remain central to our work. Including our Brightspots surveys, advocacy and independent visitors, Care Experience Voice and Influence Team, Children in Care Council and Sheffield Care Leaver Union.
 - Fostering Forum
 - The Virtual School working with schools, colleges, training providers, education settings and children's social care to improve educational outcomes.

- A dedicated multi-agency psychological services for looked after children (MAPS) and Looked After & Adoptive Children's Health Team
- Staying Close Project – supporting young people moving on from residential care to independence.
- Staying Connected Project – Improving opportunities for care experienced children and young people to strengthen relationship and spend time with family and significant people in their networks.
- Mockingbird Fostering Hubs
- Sheffield's Race Equality Commission (REC) report was launched 14th July 2022.
- The Sheffield City Council decision in December 2023 to treat “Care Experienced” as if it were a protected characteristic.
- Our local offer for care leavers