



Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023 – 2025



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Welcome

The Council's community vision for Surrey sets a clear ambition that No-one is Left Behind. This applies to all children and young people in the county but we have a particular commitment to those who are looked after by Surrey County Council. We are Corporate Parents to our looked after children and to those leaving the council's care and we have legal and moral responsibilities towards them just as we would have towards our own children and we aim to be the best parents we can be.

As with any family or parent, we aim to keep our children and young people close to friends, family, school and their familiar surroundings within Surrey. We have an ambitious investment programme building fantastic new children's homes within Surrey and, offering improved support to families and foster carers, enabling us to offer more Surrey homes to Surrey children.

For the council to be the best possible Corporate Parent, we need to set our ambitions high and bring the whole council together; staff, carers and elected members alike. We need to engage the hearts and minds of all and the resources and capacity of many in helping our children and young people to be happy, healthy and safe; to lead the lives that they want to live and fulfil their own ambitions and dreams.

We are passionate about doing the best for our looked after children and our care-experienced young people and we want to inspire everyone connected to the council and our partners to share this passion. In this strategy you can read our ambition for our children and young people and the values that underpin our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

It sets our priorities and what we will do to ensure that no child looked after by the council is left behind.



Cllr. Clare Curran
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board



Rachael Wardell
Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families

A message on behalf of children and young people

On behalf of children and young people we would like to say thank you for the changes you have made over the last few years such as the free access to leisure facilities, which has now been extended to young people placed out of county as well which is great. We think this helps with physical and mental health and is also good for young people that may not be working or on low income. Also, for responding to our requests for the National Housing Project to come to Surrey we think this project is going to benefit a lot of care leavers in Surrey and build that support network for moving on.

Going forward we would like to see more secure, positive and consistent relationships with professionals so that we can open up to them about anything that may be going on and get advice. In terms of language and writing used we prefer the term "care experienced" rather than care leaver or looked after children, this makes us feel more individual and valued. For our Top Ten Tips on working with children and young people please see [our User Voice and Participation pages](#)

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What is Corporate Parenting?¹

Looking after children is one of the most important things a council does. When a child comes into care in Surrey, the County Council becomes their 'Corporate Parent'. This means that **everyone** involved with the Council (the people who work in the Council, the elected Councillors and the Managers) has to make sure that Surrey County Council is the best parent it can be. Together they should act for that child in the same way as a good parent would. They should always ask themselves '**would this be good enough for my child**'?

The Council is also responsible for young adults who were looked after by the council up until adulthood. We sometimes describe people who are or have been looked after as 'care experienced'.

Surrey County Council knows that to be a good Corporate Parent, it should write down how it will put these responsibilities into practice. This **Corporate Parenting Strategy** says what the Council will do to meet its responsibilities and what things are planned. It also shows how decisions are made and how the Council judges how well it is doing as a Corporate Parent.



The Corporate Parenting Principles

In 2017 the Government set out in law seven [Corporate Parenting Principles](#). These are the seven things that all councils have to think about when they are doing anything that would affect looked after children or care leavers:

- 1.** To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of children and young people
- 2.** To encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- 3.** To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people.
- 4.** To help 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 children and young people
- 6.** For children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- 7.** To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living



The Surrey Family—about the children and young people we care for² on 31 March 2023



SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL

1013
children
looked after

- 66 0 - 5 year olds
- 192 6 -10 year olds
- 347 11-15 year olds
- 308 16 -17 year olds

631 males

382 females

143
unaccompanied
asylum-seeking
children

67% live in foster
care

29% live in
residential care

49% live outside of
Surrey

34% females

66% males

We are in touch
with 92% of 18-21
year olds

8% live with their
parents

5% live with former
foster carers

64% are in employment education or
training

45% live in semi-
independent or
supported environment

7% were adopted

25% returned
home

10% left care for
a Special
Guardianship
arrangement

58% turned 18 or
left care for other
reasons

848 young
people
supported
as care
leavers

- 14 16 -17 year olds
- 705 18 - 21 year olds
- 122 22 - 25 year olds

1422
children
were looked
after at any
time during
2022/23

- 389 became looked after
- 424 left care

Length of time
looked after

308
<1year

283
1 - 2 years

241
3-5 years

116
6-8 years

44
9-11 years

15
12-14 years

6
15-17 years

The Corporate Parenting Board in Surrey

The **Corporate Parenting Board (CPB)** has to make sure that Surrey County Council is the very best Corporate Parent to its children and that all children and young adults with care experience can achieve their full potential.

The Board has Councillors from all political parties and is chaired by the Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families.

The Board also has foster carers and senior leaders and managers in the Council including the Virtual School, the Corporate Parenting services and Public Health.

The Board meets six times a year, and each meeting looks in depth at one of the five priorities that the Board has set, including children's views on that topic.

The Board may look into any service for care experienced people including social care, health, education, leisure, policing, housing and transport.

The Board will respond to specific issues, blockages and challenges raised by children and young people, stakeholders and the Corporate Parenting Operational Group (CPOG). It will make sure that what is set out in this Corporate Parenting Strategy happens.

Councillors also visit services provided by the Council and its partners. They want to make sure they are of good quality and visits help them gather information to help their decisions about services for care experienced people.

This activity by the Corporate Parenting Board is looked at by the Children and Families Select Committee, and ultimately by the Cabinet of the Council who are the politicians in charge of Surrey County Council.



Our Vision

To be the best Corporate Parents we can be, working together to provide children and young people in our care with happy and healthy childhoods, helping them reach and exceed their potential and aspirations, and supporting them into successful adulthood

The values we bring to help us realise our vision

- ◆ We must be the strongest champions of and advocates for all our Looked After Children and care leavers.
- ◆ We should have unconditional positive regard for all Looked After Children and Care Leavers and make sure that all are nurtured, feel loved and supported.
- ◆ Looked After Children and Care Leavers are 'our' children and young people and we must have strong ambitions and aim high for all.
- ◆ All our young people are individuals and unique and we must parent each child as such.
- ◆ We must build trusting relationships with our children and young people so they feel able to give us their views and can talk to us about their wishes and feelings, their anxieties and hopes.
- ◆ We must listen to our children and young people and take account of their views on all matters which affect them.
- ◆ We must be resilient and persistent parents with an uncompromising approach to doing the best for our children and young people and a willingness to 'go the extra mile'.
- ◆ We want to continuously improve as corporate parents and continuously improve outcomes for our young people.



The Corporate Parenting Operational Group in Surrey

The **Corporate Parenting Operational Group (CPOG)** meets six times per year to take forward issues and decisions from the CPB. CPOG has to tell the Corporate Parenting Board and the Director of Children's Services how it is getting on with making the Corporate Parenting Strategy happen in practice.

The group also has to answer to our care experienced children, young people and their carers and tell them how it is getting on. Unlike the Corporate Parenting Board, the people coming to CPOG are those who work across the Council in all sorts of different jobs, including our children's homes, as well as foster carers and senior people from partner agencies including the NHS, Police, Fire & Rescue, and Surrey's Integrated Care System. This means the group is able to work together in Surrey across the Council and in other organisations.



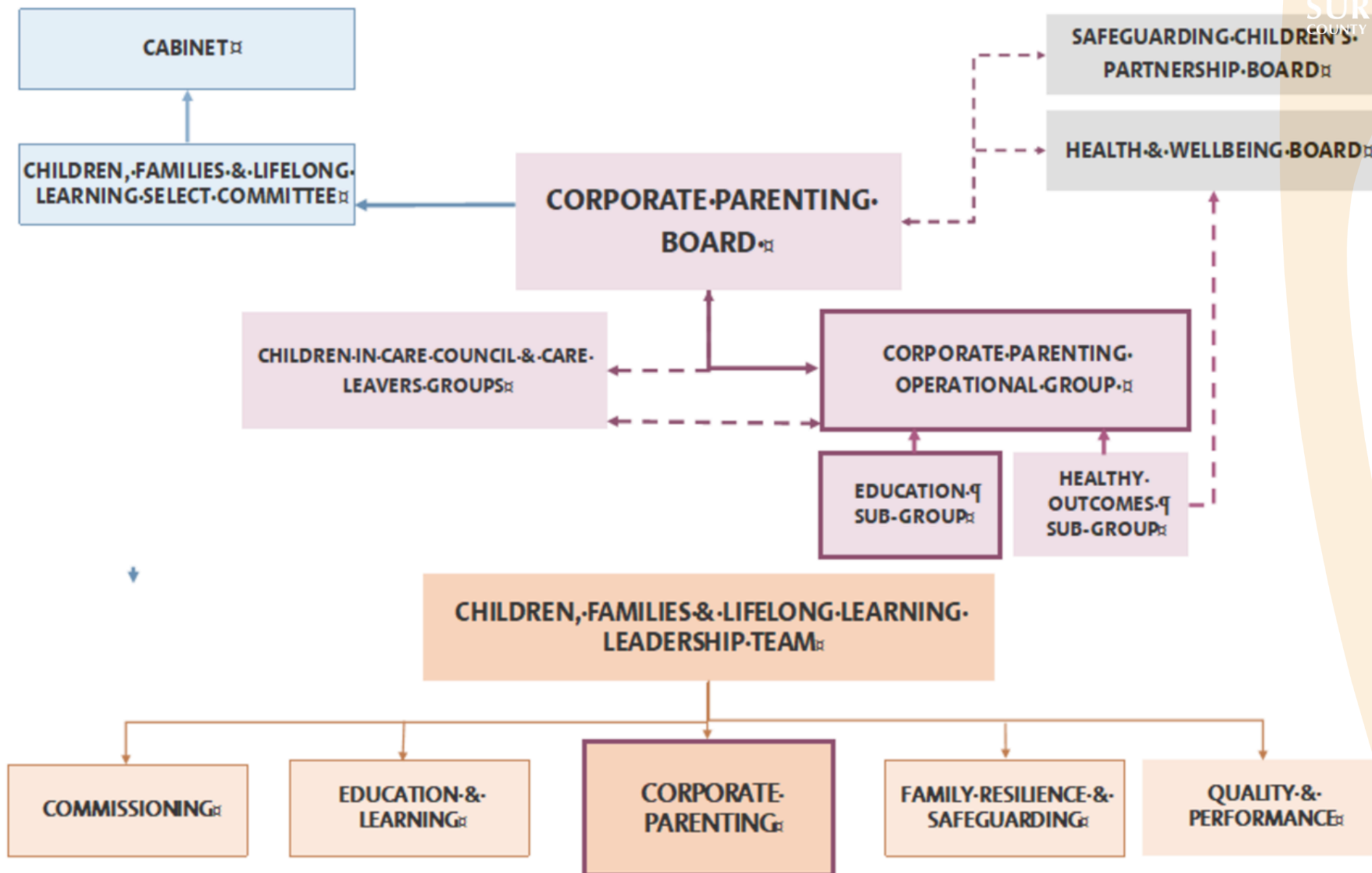
The **Healthy Outcomes Subgroup (HOSG)** reports to the Corporate Parenting Operational Group and looks at the health and wellbeing of care experienced children and young adults. Members of the Designated Professional for Looked After Children health team take it in turns to chair the meeting. The group has a plan about what they will do. Members across all services (not just health services) are involved in doing the work. They include the User Voice and Participation Team. Apprentices with lived experience of care bring their expertise to the Healthy Outcomes subgroup and to 'Healthy Outcomes for Looked after Children' training, and also adapt health reports into child-friendly versions.

An **Education Subgroup** has a focus on the education and training of children and young people. The Virtual School, including care experienced apprentices, lead and deliver on this work.

Corporate Parenting Structures in Surrey



SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL



Our journey so far

Our previous Corporate Parenting Strategy was updated in 2020. Since then we have worked hard to improve services for our children and care experienced adults:

- Roll-out of 'Total Respect' training delivered by young people
- Young people's input into Corporate Parenting Board
- Bright Spots survey
- Action Cards
- Production of child friendly documents
- Taking action in response to children's views about their education in their Personal Education Plan

Young people
shaping services



- Sign up to the Care Leavers Covenant - the national inclusion programme that supports care leavers to live independently
- Health partners' pilot to improve career opportunities for those with care experience
- How Do I...? workshops
- Rent guarantors scheme

Moving to
adulthood



- A new mental health alliance providing dedicated services for children looked after and care leavers affected by trauma and attachment difficulties, called New Leaf
- Provision of pre-payment certificates for care leavers' prescriptions
- Development of personal health budgets
- Improved access to dentistry pilot project

Health Services



- A partnership with District and Borough councils for free gym membership and swimming for children & young people, and concessions for fostering families
- Club membership and equipment for children to pursue boxing
- A standard offer of computers, driving lessons, recycled furniture and bicycles for children and young people
- Celebration fund offering equipment, lessons or funding for holidays/trips for children to pursue hobbies or interests

Leisure and
interests



- Investment in building new Surrey children's homes
- Improved financial offer to Surrey foster carers
- More supported accommodation
- Fostering friendly approaches by health partners and the council

More homes in
Surrey



- A thriving Surrey Virtual School team
- Training schools to be trauma-informed
- Ensuring all children have a high quality education wherever they live
- Grandmentors scheme

Education and
skills



- Partnership with all 11 District and Borough Councils to provide Council Tax exemptions for care leavers living within and outside Surrey

Council Tax
discounts



Our ambitions and priorities

The Corporate Parenting Board groups its work into **five themes**. Through all the themes, the voice of children and young people is central.

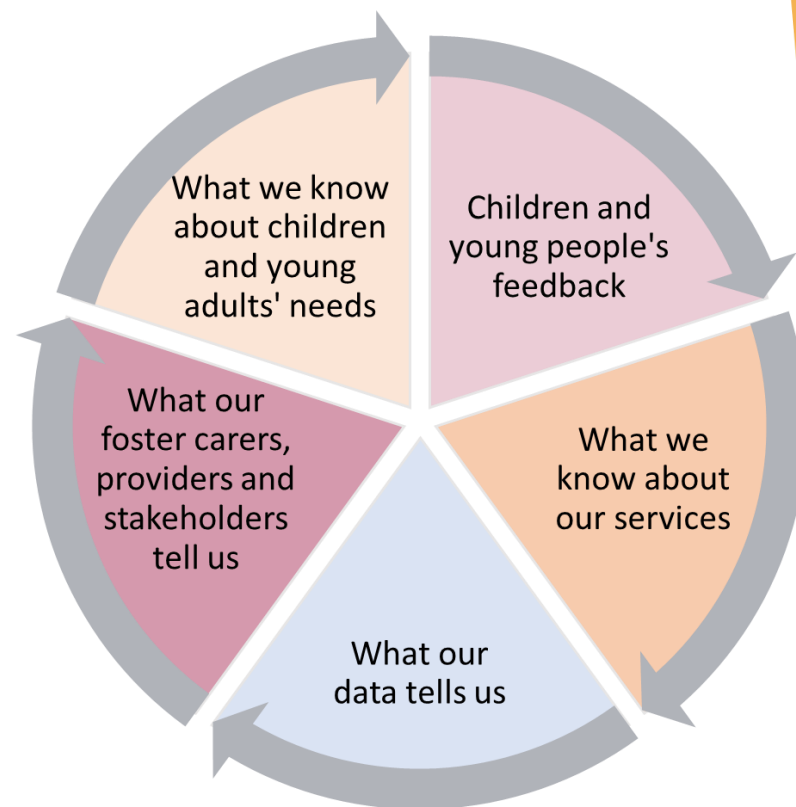


We know that we need to get more feedback from some children and young adults who aren't heard so often and the User Voice and Participation Team are working with the Care Council and Junior Care Council on how to do this.

We have gathered lots of information and views to help us decide what the **Corporate Parenting Strategy Priorities** will be in each of the five themes. The Care Council and Junior Care Council give views to the Corporate Parenting Board before each meeting and we have looked at what they have told us over the last three years.

In 2021 128 children and 180 care experienced adults took part in the Coram Voice Bright Spots surveys³ about their lives. We have also looked at what Surrey foster carers have told us in our regular meetings.

In the next few pages of this Strategy we set out more detail about what people have told us, what we know about our services, what we know children and care experienced people need and what Surrey County Council and its partners want to do to be the best Corporate Parents they can be. This has helped us decide on our ambitions and priorities.



Theme One: Safeguarding

Helping children and young people be safe, feel safe and have stability in their lives is an essential role for all parents. Many of our children may have entered our care because of neglect or abuse and some will remain vulnerable whilst in our care. We need to do everything we can to keep them safe and protect them from further harm.

What people tell us

Children and young people tell us:

- Communication and support from workers and carers can help with positive feelings of safety. Support networks need to actively listen, have consistency and be trained in mental health, trauma and first aid.
- Loneliness, uncertainty and isolation can increase feelings of being unsafe.
- Having basic needs met such as food, warm clothes, exercise and somewhere safe to live can increase feelings of being safe.
- Having a sense of financial stability has also helped some young people to feel safer when leaving care.
- More access to safe spaces and advertised open spaces like libraries and youth centres in the community is important.
- Secure accommodation is key to ensuring young people feel safe in the places they call home including secure entry into buildings, appropriate CCTV where necessary and staff on site where possible. Housing and accommodation should be of a standard that is and feels safe
- Planning—clear planning and having timelines are in place for young people's futures help to decrease feelings of uncertainty and unsafety.

(being safe is) 'making sure that my teddy is with me, my (foster parents) with me and being able to talk (to them) when I am at school if I need to

90% of 128 4-18 year olds reported always feeling safe where they live³

the unknown makes me feel unsafe, I feel safer when I know what is going on'

24% of 112 8-18 year olds were fearful of being bullied at school³

Safeguarding: What we know

We know that children and young adults with care experience can be especially vulnerable to risks in the community, such as exploitation. It's sometimes harder to keep children and young people safe if they live outside Surrey. We are not always as 'joined up' as we could be with the police and other organisations in making clear plans about how we can help keep teenagers and young adults safe from risks outside of their family

We know that we don't have an agreed 'pathway' of support for all young people; how young people are supported might be different according to where they live.

We also know that the risks don't stop just because a young person turns 18 and becomes an adult. Sometimes young people and Personal Advisers tell us that they don't always get support with helping over 18-year-olds who may be at risk of exploitation or involved with criminal gangs.

Some young people might become known to the Youth Justice service if they have committed a crime. In 2023 the number of children who are Looked After and have become known to the Youth Justice team for the first time has gone up. We need to understand more about why this might be and the support they need.



Safeguarding: What we will do

We will make sure our staff and carers have high quality safeguarding training so they can recognise and respond to any worries about children and young people's safety. This will include risks outside of the home.

We will continue to develop services with our police, health and council partners, and local communities to support young people who may be at higher risk outside of the home, including those who go missing. This includes holding 'risk management meetings' for care experienced young people up to age 25 if this is needed, and working with partners on community safety and disrupting adults who exploit others.

We will do all we can to make sure children live in safe homes in safe environments. We will continue to offer specific safety support for young people moving into their own accommodation. This includes Surrey Fire and Rescue Service's home fire safety checks, and the local District and Borough councils' reputable landlord checks. We will continue to make sure all accommodation meets our Quality Assurance checks.

We will make sure children and young people are involved in making and understanding plans, including if we are worried about their safety or risk.



Our Youth Justice team is going to look carefully at the reasons that some Looked After Children have become involved in crime. They will then work together with the social workers and their managers to see if there is anything they need to do differently and what might help the young people

Theme Two: Safe and Stable Homes

High quality homes for children are key to their care and upbringing. Our children have many different needs and having a wide range of options is essential to meeting their needs. They need to feel physical and emotionally secure where they live. As young people move towards adulthood we also need accommodation and support that can help them towards independence and a pathway towards permanent housing

What people tell us

Children and young people tell us :

- Young people need to have more of a say on where they live and who they live with, Moving around multiple times leaves them very anxious.
- Professionals should continue to ensure that children and young people are given opportunities to share their views, wishes and feelings on where they live, on their placements and that these are listened to by all agencies working with them. Where possible, options on locations should be given
- Where possible young people should be given consistent workers and experience less placement moves

Foster carers tell us:

- Delays in responsiveness from children's social workers, gaps in knowledge of the children and a lack of information sharing between services are things that could improve the support to children.
- Careful matching of the child's needs to the foster home should take priority
- Implementation of the Foster Carers' Charter is important in making sure we all work together for the child

'I like where I live but I want to be at home with my family, I don't want to be where I am forever'

22% of 82 11-18 year olds reported having 3 or more social workers in the last year³

49% of 82 11-18 year olds had kept the same social worker in the last year³

'In care a permanent placement is considered like 1year+ but for me that's still not a long time to live in one place and wish I could live somewhere for several years'

38% of 82 11-18 year olds reported having one placement since being in care³

47% of 82 11-18 year olds reported between 2 and 4 placements since being in care³

Safe and Stable Homes: What we know

We know that children are more likely to thrive within their own families. We need to support children to live within, or return to, their own families wherever possible.

We know we need to get better at talking with family members sooner about how they can support children to prevent them becoming looked after, or to care for them if they can't live with their parents or to help if they return home.

We know that for children who can't live within their birth families, providing stable and quality long-term care, usually within a family setting, gives them the best chance of success in childhood and into adulthood. Having time with parents and siblings that they don't live with is key to supporting that stability for most children.

For some children a purposeful time in a specialist placement, such as a residential school or children's home may be the best way of meeting their needs at a particular time in their life.

Over a third of children looked after by Surrey County Council live more than 20 miles from their family home address², and most of these are outside of the Surrey county boundary. Most children tend to be happier and have better outcomes when they are able to live close to family and friends and be able to stay at the same school if they become looked after.

We know we need more Surrey foster carers and residential care in Surrey so that children don't have to move outside of the county.

We visit most Looked After Children regularly - 94% are visited within the timescale laid down in law.

We also know that having the same social worker who knows the child well for some time is essential to making and carrying out good plans, and is really important to children, and those involved in supporting them.

92% of children in our care had fewer than 3 different homes in the last year and 70% have been in their current home for over 2 years, but we would always want children to have short and long term stability in where they live.



Safe and Stable Homes: What we will do

We will ensure we invest in 'edge of care' services for teenagers that help children and their families experiencing crisis. This is so that children don't become looked after, or are only looked after for the length of time that is right for them.

Where children do become looked after we will always try to enable children to live with family members or connected people wherever possible. We will make sure that social workers are trained and supported to involve family members in planning for children when they might become looked after. Our fostering service will support by helping to assess whether family members can care for children. We will continue to make sure our Family Group Conference service helps with this where needed.

We will ensure that all children have a 'permanence plan' which says how we will help the child have a stable home. This might be with their parents, other family members, with other foster carers or through special guardianship or adoption.

We will recognise that residential care may be a positive choice for some children, but we will always work towards enabling them to return to a family setting in the medium to long term.

We will continue to invest in specific 'reunification' services to assess and support children to return home where possible. We will ensure that Team Managers think about whether a return home is possible for children when they are supervising social workers.

We will look at how social workers and foster carers have more chances to build relationships and understanding of each others' roles, for example through doing training together.

We have signed up to our revised Foster Carer Charter and we will measure how well we are doing in working together and valuing foster carers.



Safe and Stable Homes: What we will do

We will relentlessly pursue 'Surrey homes for Surrey children' by investing in our in-house fostering and residential services so that we are able to have more homes and wider choice in Surrey. Surrey Heartlands who provide our health services for care experienced people locally are supporting fostering friendly employment practices in their own and partner organisations.

We will also work with other providers to increase the number and choice of foster homes, residential provision and supported living located in Surrey—this is sometimes called 'placement sufficiency'. We will also invest in projects that help children return to foster care from residential care and those that support children to return to homes in Surrey from out of the county at the earliest opportunity.

We will strive to place children in homes run by providers that Ofsted say are 'good' or 'outstanding' and minimise the use of homes that are not registered with Ofsted. Our health partners will continue to contribute to multi-agency site visits, sharing local and regional intelligence to inform planning, risk assessments and decision-making for placement providers.

We will work in partnership with education colleagues to ensure that children don't have to become looked after or move out of Surrey solely because their education needs can't be met close to home.

We will make sure we continue to provide support for family time that helps children have meaningful time with their siblings, parents and other important family members. This means we will provide good quality venues and well trained staff if support is needed.



We know how important it is for children and young people to have social workers and other important adults that they can get to know. We know how upsetting it is if workers change often. We will have a programme of 'workforce recruitment and retention' so that we can try and keep changes of social worker as low as possible. When a child's social worker has to change we will make sure a full handover takes place between social workers and managers so that all key information is passed on. Where possible we will arrange for the child to have an introduction between the new and outgoing social worker.

We will make sure that families and care settings who are looking after unaccompanied asylum seeking young people are aware of their specific needs. This includes how their journey to the UK and separation from family is affecting them, as well as meeting their cultural, religious and language needs.

Theme Three: Education, Employment & Training

We know that school is, for most children, a key place where friendships are made, and their future is enriched through access to education, sport, cultural and leisure activities. As good parents we must focus our efforts to ensure care experienced children and young people reach their potential and aspirations in education and employment. We should address the impact of educational disadvantages children may have faced so that we challenge the poorer educational outcomes children may otherwise experience.

What people tell us

Children and young people tell us:

- How they feel about their education every school term in their Personal Education Plan
- Most young people were positive about their experience of education, employment and training
- They want to be given opportunities for work experience and mentoring and ongoing opportunities including apprenticeships in the Council
- They felt they need more specific guidance and action planning for those that want it and that awareness of opportunities that will help education and careers planning should be better publicised.
- There was a lack of understanding from some school staff and employers about care experienced young people and their experiences

77% of 30 8-11 year-olds and 73% of 82 11-18 year olds liked school/college

97% of 82 11-18 year-olds reported that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'³

'I like going to school and seeing my friends'

Foster carers tell us that most of them found the support from the Virtual School helpful:

- The Virtual School is "good at injecting support during critical times"
- "Thank you for all the meetings you've attended and all the patience and persistence you've shown in getting (child) what he needs."
- "We just wanted to say a big thank you for working so quickly to get (child) into his new school."
- "School staff need to be trauma informed and therapeutic in their approaches."

Schools tell us:

- "I have only just become designated teacher so this training has given me knowledge and confidence". (New to role designated teacher talking about training from the Virtual School)
- Pupil premium plus funding has enabled :-
- "...a tutor to teach a subject not covered by the school but needed for the student's next step."
- children to attend clubs and activities which gave them "a sense of belonging, enabled them to make new friends and be able to enjoy something they were passionate about."
- Other Designated Teachers talked about children becoming "courageous and being confident to try performing in front of their peer group."

Education, Employment and Training: What we know

If children have to move school as a result of moving whilst in care they will experience disrupted education and achieve poorer outcomes. This can last right through their childhood and into adulthood. In particular we know that school moves in years 10 and 11 contribute to poorer Key Stage 4 (Year 11) outcomes for children and young people.

We also know that attending school regularly enables children and young people to get the very best out of their education, helps them to feel stable and safe, and achieve better outcomes. Teachers are important as 'key adults' in children's lives, can support them to develop positive relationships and friendships and encourage them to be ambitious about their future.

Achieving qualifications in English and Maths, including GCSEs and Functional Skills, are an essential gateway for young people on their journey into post 16 education, employment, apprenticeship and other training opportunities. In 2023, many more Looked After Children in Surrey achieved a GCSE grade 4 or above in English and Maths than the previous year, and over 70% finished school having achieved one or more qualifications.

There are many different pathways available to young people. We are committed to providing the individual help, support and advice every young person needs to reach their potential, and progress to their chosen post 16 destination. This includes children and young people with additional needs. Nearly 30% of care experienced children in Surrey have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which identifies what additional needs they have and how these should be supported, and many others have additional needs which does not need an EHCP but where their schools put in additional help and support.

61% of care experienced adults aged 19-21 that we support are in education, employment and training, and this increases to 67% for those aged 22 to 25.

'Education means everything to me, I finished college and worked for a couple of years and then realised what I want to do in life. I went back to education to study what I'm most passionate about'

'Schools and colleges don't understand mental health or the struggles of care leavers'



Education, Employment & Training: What we will do

As well as reading every individual Personal Education Plan (PEP) we will look at the themes and ideas that children and young people contribute to their PEP and use these to improve all our services. PEPs provide one of the most consistent and frequent ways we collect views, including every age group and every child during every school term

We will continue to ensure that everyone involved with children, including the Gateway to Resources team and social work teams avoid home moves in years 10 and 11 wherever possible. Where a child has to move home, then every effort will be made to ensure they can remain at the same school.

We will provide specific training for Social Workers on education and how they can make a difference.

Care experienced young people will be offered a Personal Education Plan meeting at least termly until the end of the year in which they turn 18 so that everyone is aware of their plans and how they will be supported.

The Council will embed its commitment to the Care Leavers Covenant working with partners to open up opportunities for young people so that we can increase the numbers of young people who are employed, in training or still in education.

The Virtual School will continue to work closely with parents and carers to provide the training and information they have requested to help them support children and young people with their education.

We will make sure we join up with key partners, including the Department for Work and Pensions to make sure there is a 'menu of options' for young people looking for employment and training, and make sure Personal Advisers are aware of what is available.

The Virtual School will continue to develop the post-18 advisor role and work with education providers to ensure their offer to care experienced young people recognises and meets their needs.



We will explore with our accommodation providers how they can support young people with reducing any barriers to education, employment or training, including mental health, isolation, loneliness and having good routines.

Theme Four: Health and Wellbeing

Good parents advocate for good health care for their children and we need to provide children and young adults with good routine healthcare and more specialist treatment when necessary. Children may have been harmed through neglect or abuse in their earlier lives or have experienced trauma. They need to be able to access and benefit from high quality emotional health or mental health services.

What people tell us

Children and young people say:

- Many felt they were supported to manage their physical health but wanted more support from carers and health services with their mental health
- 89% in a November 2022 survey knew who to turn to about their emotional wellbeing or mental health
- They were concerned about waiting times for therapy or emotional health support and want there to be more services to decrease waiting lists.
- They want foster carers to have better understanding of trauma
- They want to feel listened to in appointments and for professionals to understand the care system and the impact it can have on young people

12% of children (9 children) had low positivity about their future, 10% (of 82 children) had a low sense that things they do are worthwhile and 13% had low life satisfaction³

59% of 180 adult care leavers reported high or medium levels of anxiety³

'I would reduce waiting lists for mental health services. Don't just see me for six weeks and then drop me when I still need support.'

'The nurse is really friendly and nice, she makes sure my appointments happen'

66% (of 82 children) were positive about their future³

19% of 180 care leavers reported having a disability or long-term illness³

Health and Wellbeing: What we know

We know that care experienced children and adults are the second highest group impacted by life-long health inequalities. We also know that care experienced young adults could benefit from having ongoing support from the Looked After Nursing team to help them navigate health services and advocate for them.

We know there is a link between children and young adults' emotional well-being and their understanding of their life story, including their time with their parents and siblings. The less settled that children feel about where they live or the more home moves they have had, the higher the chance that they will report low well-being. In the 2022 'Your Life Beyond Care' survey 85% of the care experienced young adults felt that someone had explained to them why they had been in care. This is a higher proportion compared to care experienced young people (77%) in other local authorities.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires are a way of measuring children's well-being; a score of 0-13 indicates a 'close to average' level of difficulties. In Surrey the average SDQ score in 2022-23 was 19 indicating children on average had a high level of emotional and behavioural difficulties. The New Leaf Service provides dedicated and needs-led mental health support to care experienced children and young adults up to aged 25 living in Surrey or up to 20 miles outside. Children are waiting less time than before to receive support for emotional health needs.



We know that a pilot project in conjunction with NHS England has been successful in improving access to dentistry for Looked After Children in Surrey and neighbouring counties and we would want this work to continue.

Children who have been looked after for more than 6-months are more likely to be at a healthy weight than those coming into care, and other children measured in year 6 under the national child measurement programme.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children have some very specific needs in relation to their physical and mental health. Our health providers have highly-skilled practitioners and nurses to ensure health needs are met, including immunisations, specialist screening and specialist mental health support.

Health and Well-being: What we will do

We will make sure that all Looked After Children have been supported to understand their life-story through making books, photos and memory boxes and have the chance to talk with their allocated worker and carers. Team Managers will check how this is happening when they supervise social workers.

Young people leaving care will all have had life-story work or life-journey letters.

We will also make sure that Personal Advisers understand the history of Care Leavers, particularly their journey into care and feel able to speak confidently with young people about their life histories. There will be comprehensive discussions at transfer into the Care Leavers' service and managers will regularly look at this when they supervise staff.

The Council and health teams will continue to work closely together to champion the health needs and outcomes of Looked After Children and adults with care experience. This includes ensuring children receive health assessments on time. We will advocate for the pilot offer of increased dental provision to continue, and encourage carers to proactively book children into dental appointments. We will also continue the long-term work being done to support Care Leavers into the workplace to support the reduction of health inequalities.

Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Board will continue their work with other partners on the multi-agency project developing a whole systems approach to influence healthy weight for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

We will recognise that unaccompanied asylum seeking young people face particular difficulties with their physical and emotional health and will work with health providers to ensure they have access to immunisations, health screening and emotional well-being services that reflect their journey and trauma

Healthy Outcomes for Looked after Children training will continue to be provided for carers and staff, delivered jointly by the Designated Health Team for Looked After Children in conjunction with Surrey Academy, Apprentices with lived experience of care and the User Voice and Participation Team. We will also continue to enable our foster carers to have training and support in caring for children with trauma, and membership of the National Association for Therapeutic Parenting (NAPT).

Through the provision of the New Leaf service we will continue to ensure there is a service dedicated to providing mental health and emotional wellbeing for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.



Theme Five: Leisure, Skills & Preparation for Independence

All children have interests, talents and skills that make their lives better. Good parents support and encourage children to participate in different activities and opportunities, try new hobbies, develop new skills and have new experiences. Supporting children and young people into adulthood and independence is a major responsibility for all parents.

We recognise that people grow up at different ages and speeds and that what independence means is different for each young person, depending on their needs, experiences and circumstances. Independence is not just about skills, but also about lasting relationships, feeling strong, security and stability and knowing about options for the future. We need to be there to pick up and back up young people when we are needed.

What people tell us about Leisure & Skills

Children and young people say:

- The council should liaise with the District and Borough Councils to ensure there are consistent opportunities for care experienced adults to access activities free or at a discounted rate
- They wanted more online and print information highlighting activities and workshops available, including what is available, where, costs and transport
- Workers should be encouraged to sign-post young people and their carers to other schemes and concessions in their area
- The majority (92%) of children and young people aged 4-18 years had fun, or took part in hobbies or activities outside of school (Bright Spots Nov 2022)
- Money, young people's location and their mental health can all be barriers to them having fun

94% of 82 young people aged 11-18yrs reported getting the chance to practise life skills ('all or most of the time' or 'sometimes')³

'I think my PA doesn't have much knowledge on what's available, or if I'm wrong about that then there just isn't many options'

'My foster parents help me to learn to do things around the house and garden and how to look after my clothes and room better'

'Yes my PA always informs me of workshops happening for life skills such as cooking. I have also been offered a free gym membership'

What people tell us about Preparation for Independence

Children and young people say:

- Young people need support advice and guidance from an earlier age, tailored to each individual's wishes, feeling and needs. They want more opportunities to become independent through online resources that suit their needs and can be picked up at any time/age.
- 28% surveyed said they didn't receive support at the right age—factors were social worker changes, no help to learn life skills/daily tasks, no Personal Adviser, lack of housing support, understanding money and benefits, support in education
- They want consistency to ensure that they all receive the same information and opportunities to learn independence skills and to know about workshops that might support so they don't miss out on opportunities because they don't know about them.

65% of 180 care leavers who responded had the same worker for a year or more³

'...having people that are reliable and have a full understanding of what independence as a care leaver actually is. It's not just preparing us to look after ourselves but also our mental health and well-being.'

'I have had a lot of support from foster carers, friends and my PA. They've provided support, advice, encouragement and inspired me in my education.'

'I did not receive much support at all, constant social worker changes, no sense of stability, social worker not communicating with me and generally being unreachable for more than 6 weeks at a time'

'I would have liked to have been more prepared on things like gas and electric usage and the best way to reduce costs'

19% of 180 young people were finding it 'quite' or 'very' difficult to get by financially³

Leisure, Skills and Preparation for Independence: What we know

The activities that children and young people can take part in can be different depending where they live in Surrey, and if they are out of Surrey it can be even more difficult for their social worker or personal adviser to know what might be available.

Surrey does not have one particular tool or pathway that sets out what skills children should learn as they get older. Some, but not all, foster carers and residential homes are really good at writing down what skills children have learnt and what they still need help with. We have had really positive feedback about the leisure offer, bicycle scheme and boxing scheme that we have rolled out so far and the celebration fund helps to support and recognise children's talents and interests.

We are 'in touch' with 91% of those aged 19-21 years who have been in our care, and with 36% of those aged 22—25 years*

75% of care experienced young people aged 17-18 are in education, employment or training. The percentage for those aged 19 - 21 years is 61% and 67% for those aged 22 - 25 years that we are touch with. We know that engagement in fulfilling activities (including education, employment, training and volunteering) is important to quality of life. Doing well in education, training and employment makes a big difference to people when they become adults.

For 19-21 year olds, 8% live with parents, 29% live in supported accommodation, 4% live with supported lodgings carers, 5% live with foster carers and 2% were in custody. The remainder were living independently.

Affordable accommodation is a worry for young people and we know that offers for permanent housing are different across the county.

93% of care experienced young people responding to the Bright Spots survey had been involved in their pathway planning all or some of the time. 34% reported positive experiences with managing their money. Our data shows

that 99% of care experienced young people had a pathway plan, and 78% of these had been reviewed in the last 6 months.

Surrey Council and its partners has signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant and is committed to developing opportunities for young people supported by the council



* young people aged 22 to 25 are able to ask for our support, but we don't have to stay in touch with them if they don't want support.

Leisure, Skills & Preparation for Independence : What we will do

We want to increase the chances for care experienced young people to be in employment, education or training and will continue to develop the Care Leavers' Covenant offer in Surrey. Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Board in partnership with Career Matters and other Surrey Health services will work towards achieving 'The Lived Experience Charter' and improving opportunities and job roles for those with lived experience of the care system.

We will also commit to ensuring all care experienced young people that we support are in Band A or B on the housing register and will work with our partners in the District and Borough Councils to enable them to have an offer of permanent housing by aged 21 years. We will further develop our policy on fair rent for care experienced young people who are in full time employment.

We want to continue improving our service for those people who are leaving care across the county to ensure staff know how to support young people on a day to day basis and to make sure that no matter where care experienced people live, they get a consistent service. To help with this, managers might observe workers during their work, and look at their case records, including completing a formal audit.

We are rolling out compulsory training to be completed by all people working with young people who require a Pathway Plan. We will also make sure each team has a 'Pathway Plan Champion' to help the people they work with get better in working with young people on their Pathway Plan.

We will continue to work closely with adult services to ensure our young people with additional needs and disabilities are supported and cared for as they become adults.

We will continue to promote 'Staying Put' for young people to stay with their former foster carers by providing financial and practical support.

We will look into the tools, groups and opportunities used to help children and young people develop their life-skills and then make a plan to share these across all our services in Surrey. We will develop one strong offer of independence skills training or development and print a list of services that can support young people in the Care Leavers' Local Offer.










We will continue to promote the How Do I...? Workshops

We will continue to work with our District and Borough Councils, as well as local clubs and voluntary organisations to have a leisure offer that young people and their carers can use and afford.



Our Pledge to children and young people

While we were refreshing this Strategy we spoke to children and young people about what they expected of us as corporate parents. We have agreed these are the things that we will do.

	Help To Be Safe	We will do everything we can to protect you from harm, to keep you safe and help you feel happy and secure.
	A Good Home	We will make sure you have a good quality home and can be part of your local community
	Keeping In Touch	We will help you stay in touch safely with people that are important to you
	Being Healthy	We will support you to be as healthy as possible—this includes having a healthy body and mind
	Achieving Your Best	We will support you with school, college, training and work so that you can achieve your best and have good opportunities when you get older
	New Experiences	We will make sure you have the chance to do hobbies, follow your interests and have new experiences
	Becoming An Adult	We will help you to feel confident and able to deal with difficult times in your life and we will help you prepare for becoming an adult
	Listening & Including You	We will listen to you and include you as much as we can when we make plans and decisions that affect your life
	Help That's Right For You	We will make sure our support is helpful for each individual person, and easy for everyone to use. We will stand up for young people if their voices are not being heard

How we will make it happen

The Corporate Parenting Board and the Corporate Parenting Operational Group will make sure that we do what we have said we will do in this Strategy.

1

To be the best Corporate Parents we can be, we need to make sure that **the whole Council, together with our partners, understands and helps us.**

All Councillors and people who work for the Council should stand up for and represent care experienced people and should make sure they care about those children and young people as if they were their own child.

We will carry on promoting the Total Respect training to help people learn more about working alongside children and young people.

We will also **work closely with our in-house foster carers and other people who look after our children.** We want to hear their views and ensure they are supported and trained to provide good care. The **Foster Carers Charter** tells us how we should work well together with Surrey's foster carers and we will regularly check how well we are measuring up against the Charter.

We will help other services in the area to get involved with care experienced people. This includes other councils who provide housing and leisure, and other organisations and companies who can sign up to the Care Leavers' Covenant



2

We will continue to get **feedback from children and young people** on what we are getting right and what we need to do better by:

- Responding to what children and young people's tell us in surveys and action cards
- Seeking views from care experienced people before every Corporate Parenting Board
- Working towards key meetings including the Corporate Parenting Board being co-chaired by young people
- Supporting the work of the Care Council and Junior Care Council to increase the numbers of children and young people involved, and trying to get views from children who are not heard as often
- Work with CoramBAAF to get views every year in the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey for children and 'Your Life Beyond Care' survey for Care Leavers.
- Listening and acting on what young people have told us we should do to put our Pledge into practice

How we will make it happen

3

We will make sure this Corporate Parenting Strategy joins **up with all the other work** that is taking place in the Council and with our partners. There are some other important documents that say how we will all work together to improve services for children and young people:

- The Nurses and Doctor in the Integrated Care Board team that supports Looked After Children have developed a **Looked After Children and Care Leaver Health Partnership Strategy 2023-2026**. This says how we will all work together to improve health and well-being for children and young people.
- The **Surrey Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy 2022-2027⁴** says what is needed to make sure that children in Surrey have access to the right services to support their mental health and emotional well-being. Looked After Children are identified as a group who may need extra or different support.
- The **Surrey Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2025⁵** says what the Council will do to make sure we have enough of the right homes, care and services in the right places to effectively support children and young people.



4

We will make sure we keep **measuring some important information** (called 'performance indicators') which helps tell us what is happening for children and young adults, including:

- How many children become care experienced in Surrey each year and what they are like (such as their age, where they live, how long they are looked after for)
- How many children are able to stay close to their family home
- What type of home children are living in
- How many changes of home children have had
- What Ofsted tells us about the quality of homes or services for children
- How many social workers children have had
- How children are doing in education
- Measures about children's emotional health
- How many care experienced young adults we stay in touch with
- How many care experienced people are in education, employment or training
- Where care experienced people live and whether it is suitable for them
- Measures about children's physical health
- How many foster carers we have and why they start and end fostering

References

1. [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
2. Surrey County Council performance data at 31 March 2023
3. [Bright Spots Programme - Coram Voice](#)
4. [Surrey Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy 2022-2027](#)
5. [Surrey Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children, Care Leavers and children on the edge of care 2020-2025](#)

Key contacts and further information—click on the links below for further information

[Looked After Children and Care Leavers - ICS \(surreyheartlands.org\)](https://surreyheartlands.org)

[Surrey Virtual School \(SVS\) - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](https://surreycc.gov.uk) and [Surrey Virtual School Q&A Film Sign Language Version - YouTube](#)

[Surrey Youth Voice—information for Looked after Children](#)

[Surrey Youth Voice—Care Leavers Local Offer](#)

[Surrey Youth Voice— Surrey Care Leavers Covenant](#)

[About the Corporate Parenting Board](#)

[Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022-23](#)

[Corporate Parenting Board Forward Plan 2023-24](#)

[Corporate Parenting Board Forward Plan 2024-25](#)

[Surrey's Leisure Offer for Looked After Children and Care Leavers](#)

[Celebration Fund](#)

[Boxing Scheme](#)

[Surrey County Council Sufficiency Strategy](#)