



Appendix 1:

Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2023 - 2024

Introduction

Welcome to our Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2023/24. This report should be read in conjunction with the Peterborough Virtual School Annual Report 2023-2024, and the PCC Participation Annual Report 2023-2024.

This year has been challenging for Children's Services. While the number of children in our care remained stable from 2022-23 to 2023-24, the complexity of their needs, particularly in emotional health and wellbeing, has increased. Additionally, limited placement options have made it difficult to find suitable local homes for children and young people.

This report sets out a picture of the children we care for (CiC) and those young people transitioning to adulthood (CL) in 2023-2024; this includes those we have begun caring for and those who have left our care. It also provides details of permanence, stable homes and sufficiency.

From November 27 to December 8, 2023, Peterborough City Council underwent an inspection by Ofsted under the ILACS framework. The services were rated as 'Inadequate' for 'The experiences and progress of care leavers' and 'Requires Improvement' for 'The experiences and progress of children in care.' This was a challenging message for our dedicated workforce committed to delivering services to children. However, Ofsted acknowledged the positive impact of the new leadership team, which has continued to drive improvements throughout 2023-2024.

"The new leadership team, led by an experienced director for children's services (DCS), has quickly grasped the scale and nature of the improvement that is needed. Since July, the leadership team has completed a robust and accurate self-evaluation, identified the crucial areas for improvement and begun to tackle these, with appropriate prioritisation."

Definition of Corporate Parent and Principles

Peterborough City Council is a 'Corporate Parent' which means it is the 'collective responsibility' of the whole Council, elected member, employees, and partner agencies to provide the best possible care and safeguarding for Children in Care (CIC) and young people with care experience (CL).

As 'Corporate Parents', the formal and informal Corporate Parenting Committees oversee the Council's fulfilment of this 'collective responsibility'.

In February 2018, the Department for Education published Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities for applying Corporate Parenting Principles for children in their care and care leavers. As corporate parents, elected members and council officers have a statutory responsibility for the wellbeing of the children and young people we care for. Elected members play a key role in holding officers and partners to account as well as being proactive corporate parents themselves. To thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. The seven principles below underpin the CPC approach, and the work of Children's Services, all officers of the council and statutory partners.

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- 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.
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

The question Corporate Parents should be asking when considering the needs of the children and young people we care for is 'What would I want for my own child, or children I care about?'

Our Key Priorities 2023/24

- Timeliness of Initial Health Care Assessments (IHA)

Children and Young People should have an Initial Health Assessment within 28 days of the local authority assuming their care; only 4.5% were completed within timescale in 2023-2024.

- Completion of annual dental checks - Identifying accessible NHS dental treatment for our children in care and care leavers is a priority area in 2023 - 2024.

87% of children and young people had a dental check. This is higher than our statistical neighbours (83%) and the national average (79%).

- Completion of SDQs prior to Health Assessments - This will be addressed by Children Services and Health in 2023- 2024 to ensure the correct person with the most knowledge of the child supports with the completion of the SDQ prior to the health assessment being completed.

Reporting data does not capture the stage at which the SDQ was completed. Completion of SDQs remains low across all children and young people we care for and will be an area for ongoing improvement.

- Maintain a strong focus on physical health of our children in care and care leavers to ensure there are no delays in accessing dental care and health assessments / subsequent treatments.

The Improvement Board continues to ensure accountability to health partners. A summary of the health activity across 2023-2024 is set out in the Annual Health Report to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

- To undertake an effective corporate parenting self-assessment using the Local Government Association (LGA) self- assessment tool.

An LGA peer review was conducted in July 2024. The findings from this review have informed ongoing improvement activity and have supported the transition from a Corporate Parenting Committee to a Corporate Parenting Board which will be reported on in 2025-2026.

- To review the focus and workplan of the Corporate Parenting Committee following the completion of the self- assessment.

The Corporate Parenting Committee workplan is reviewed ahead of each committee. There have been administrative changes to the committee this year

which has impacted on this being achieved. A review of the workplan will be an integral part of the implementation from a committee to a board in 2025-2026.

- Review the Corporate Parenting scorecard data to ensure that it provides an overview of the areas of focus as well as usual business.

This commenced in March 2024 with the new Senior Leadership Team working with the performance team to develop a comprehensive scorecard. The separation of the combined authorities presented additional areas for Peterborough City Council to overcome in achieving this.

- To strengthen the role and remit of the Corporate Parenting Champions. To review the membership of the Corporate Parenting Committee to ensure that all areas of the council are represented that can improve the lived experiences of our children looked after and care leavers.

A review was completed at the end of 2024. Full consideration of membership and representation will be integral in the transition from a committee to a board in 2025-2026.

- Strengthen the support offered to our care leavers and ensure that the service is sufficient to meet the needs of these young people.

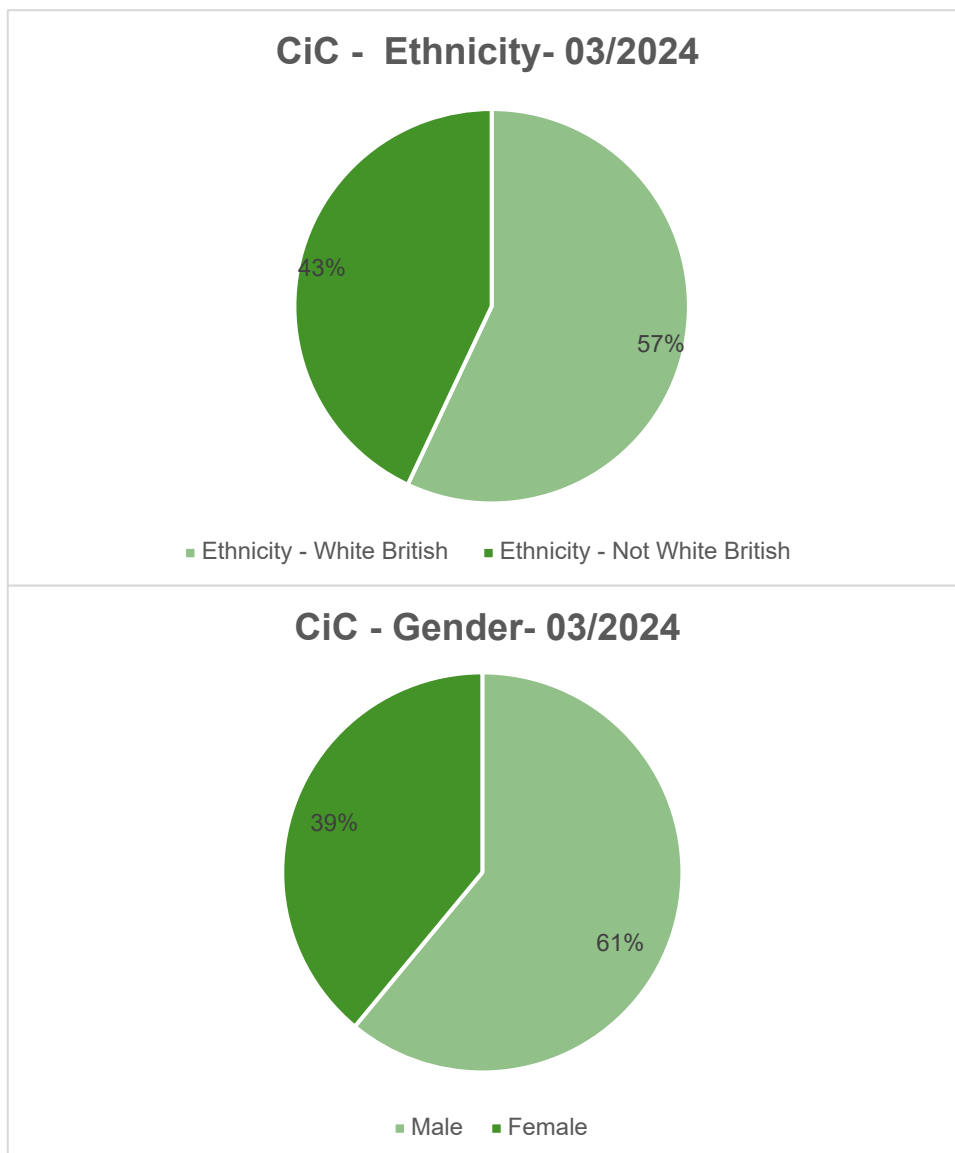
In April 2024, additional Personal Advisor roles were created to maximise the impact of the support available to our Care Leavers.

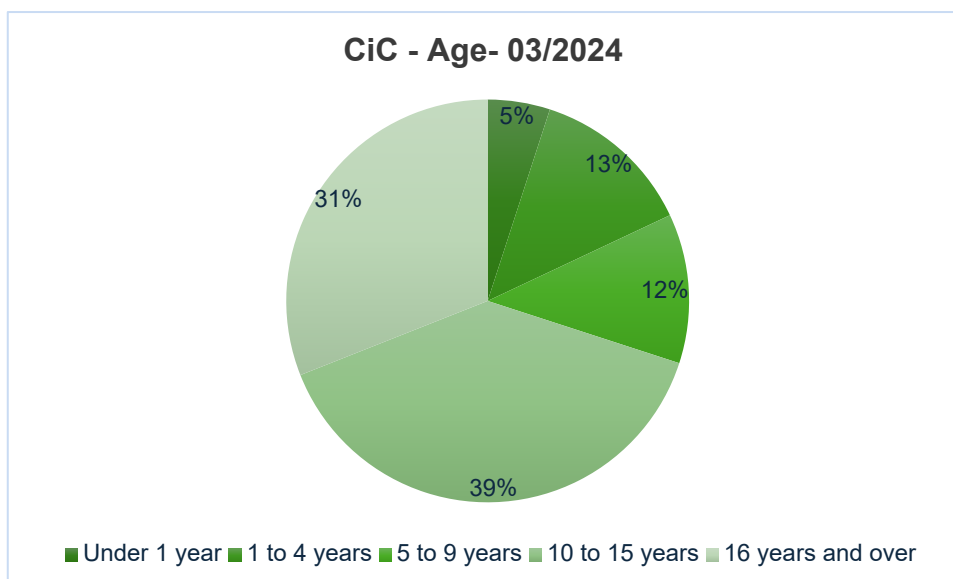
- Strengthen the way in which our young people can engage with and have access to key resources and activities who are living in homes 20 + miles from Peterborough.

In 2023-2024, we have not consistently supported this for all children and young people who live more than 20 miles from their home. This is a priority as we move into 2024-2025.

Who are the children and young people we care for?

The charts below depict the characteristics of the children and young people we cared for at the end of March 2024.





On the 31st of March 2024, PCC was caring for 422 children and young people, this is an increase of 3.2% on the 409 children and young people in our care on the 31st of March 2023 and a 20% increase on the same in March 2022.

Within the 422 children, we began caring for 161 children this year and ceased caring for 147. Of those we began caring for, 75% were due to, ‘abuse or neglect’ and 16% due to ‘absent parenting’. Of those we ceased caring for, 13% secured permanence through adoption and 6.1% through special guardianship.

70% of children and young people in our care are over the age of 10 years, with 31% over 16 years; this placed additional demand on the capacity of social workers and team managers to meet their needs as this necessitates dedicating increasing amounts of time to meetings, care planning, face to face work with children and young people and support to their carers, without negating our duty to younger children we care for.

Peterborough City Council continues to receive children into our care through the National Transfer Scheme which allows Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children to move to a different local authority to begin a care placement rather than responsibility falling disproportionately on local authorities at their port of entry or across London councils. Across 2023-2024, we have continued to work with the UK Home Office, Refugee Council, and partner agencies to appropriately support these children upon arrival; funding for these children is the responsibility of the UK Home Office with no mandate at this time for local authorities to care for more UASC than 0.7% of their total child population.

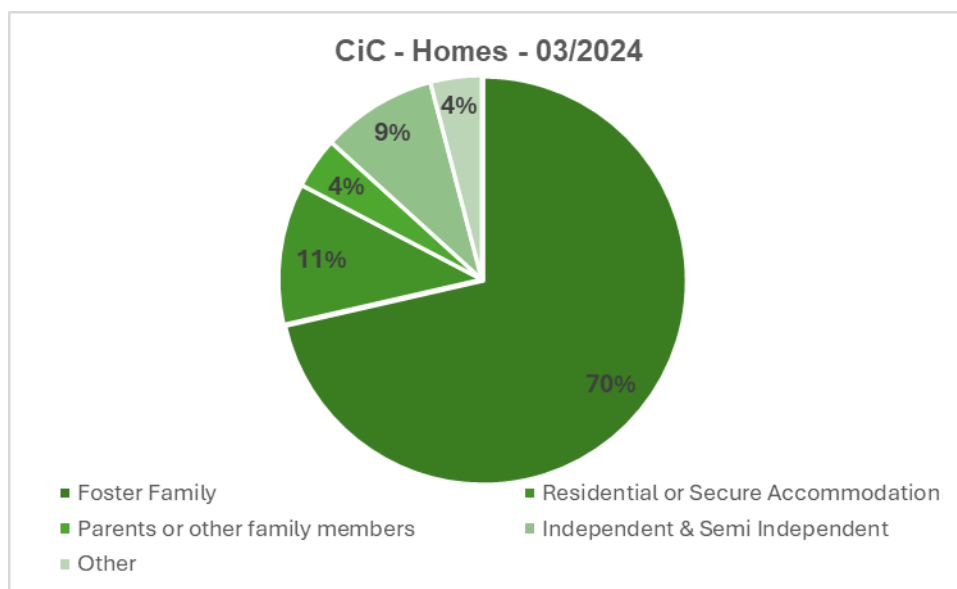
Within the numbers of children Peterborough City Council was caring for at the end of March 2024, 42 were separated migrant children (UASC). For PCC this is a reduction of 14.3% from 49 children at the end of March 2023 but a 46% increase on the 27 children we cared for at the end of 2022, this continues to create pressure on capacity across the children in care and care leaver service and for our partners. The needs of these children and young people requires time, expertise and specialist knowledge to

understand the impact of the significant trauma they have experienced and to support them to adjust and adapt to a new life which lacks certainty due to the legal process they must follow in seeking asylum.

The number of children becoming looked after by Peterborough City Council has stabilized in 2023-2024 however we know that along with our regional and national peers, as summarised above, the increase in the complexity of need that children are presenting with as a result of traumatic lived experiences, and the number of older children who are becoming looked after continues to create additional pressure on Peterborough City Council and partners to identify and secure suitable homes, education, medical and therapeutic treatment.

Where children and young people live

The majority (70%) of the children and young people were cared for in foster families at the end of March 2024, this is higher than children in the care of our closest statistical neighbour and the national average.



We continue to depend on foster homes provided by Independent Fostering Agencies and privately operated children's homes which create a significant financial pressure; this is not unique to Peterborough and is reflected nationally with the demand for homes for children and young people outweighing the available resource. This means that in 2023-2024, children and young people too often lived in homes that were available rather than homes which are consistently matched to their needs, this negatively impacts on the 43% of children and young people who did not have long term placement stability this year.

The availability of homes also necessitates some children and young people (27%) living outside of the Peterborough boundary and more than 20 miles from their family home. This is known to detrimentally affect children’s peer relationships, their schooling, their sense of identity and belonging.

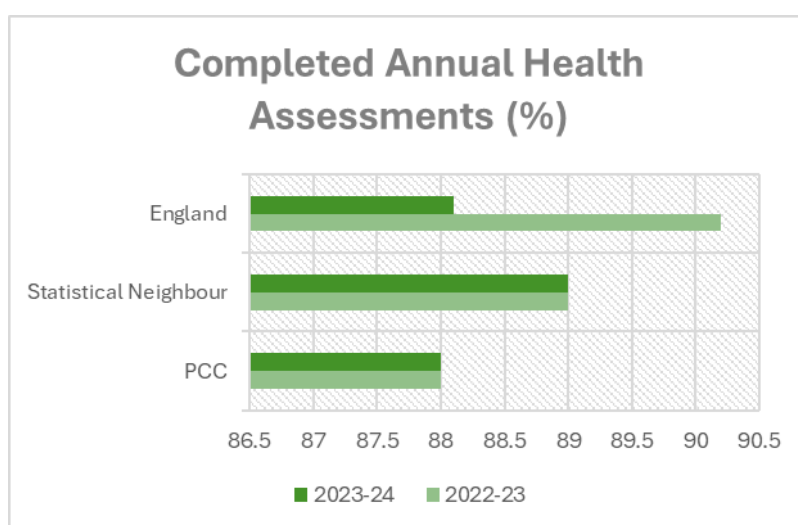
Where young people are living independently or in semi-independent accommodation, this was not always with appropriately planned transitions and for some was as a result of appropriate care placements not being available for them.

A small number of children and young people (4%) lived with their parents or other family member whilst remaining legally in the care of the local authority; these were not always planned reunifications to family and are more frequently because of young people choosing to return to their families without prior planning.

Health and Wellbeing

Children under the age of 5 years should have a Review Health Assessment (RHA) every 6 months and children and young people aged 5-18 years of age should have an annual assessment. Health assessments help children and young people stay healthy, by supporting positive physical, emotional, and mental health. We recognise that staying healthy and well can mean that other things in children and young people’s lives can be easier for them to navigate, for example making friends, building trusted relationships with adults, understanding their unique identities, and making sense of their lived experiences.

The table below depicts the percentage of annual health assessments completed in 2023-2024.



The number of children who had their annual health assessment has not improved since 2022-2023. This is mitigated by our understanding that all children and young

people have access to necessary routine health care and vaccinations; children, young people and their carers have also had access to General Practitioner services and advice and guidance provided by the Looked After Child nurse.

For children and young people coming into the care of Peterborough City Council, Initial Health Assessments were completed within 28 days for 4.5% of children and young people.

It is essential that social workers ensure that annual health assessments are completed for all children and young people we care for and where there are delays relating to the availability of health services, this should be escalated to senior managers who work with health partners on improving the services to cared for children and young people.

The Improvement Board is aware of the performance information above and continues to ensure accountability to health partners regarding delays in the completion of assessments.

Emotional Wellbeing

All children and young people between 3 years and 16 years of age who we care for, should have an up to date Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). This is a brief assessment which is used to assess and monitor children's mental health. Alongside general health information, the SDQ supports early identification for carers, social workers, health, and education partners regarding things which may be affecting a child or young person's behavioural presentation, their emotional wellbeing, educational attainment, peer relationships, and their ability to enjoy their childhood.

This year, we completed 41.4% of SDQs. Of the SDQs completed in 2023-2024, the average score for the children and young people in our care was 14.9. The distribution of scores was as follows: 54 were classified as normal (49.5%), 13 as borderline (11.9%), and 42 as cause for concern (38.5%). For those children and young people categorized as borderline or cause for concern, we would expect a timely referral to CAMHS; however, this did not consistently occur for all individuals.

YOUUnited, have continued to provide a service for children and young people aged 5-17 years of age presenting with concerns for their emotional well-being and mental health. YOUUnited comprises of four partners: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust (CPFT), Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust (CCS), Ormiston Families, and Centre 33. The service triages referrals from professionals, parents, carers, and young people and identifies the right service to meet the child or young person's needs. Capacity within YOUUnited and wider services has continued to affect the timeliness of assessment and intervention for all children and young people.

At this time, reliable data is not available to report from or to measure the timeliness and impact of YOUUnited, this was noted to be unavailable in 2022-2023 and assurances were given that it would be available for this year. Moving forward, Children's Services will work with NHS partners to ensure that accurate performance

information is available to ensure we can collectively identify and overcome barriers to prompt support and intervention.

Dental Health

Of the children and young people we care for, 87% had a dental check in 2023-2024. This is 1% less than the previous year but remains higher than our statistical peers and the national figure. This does not mean that this is not an area which requires improvement in 2024-2025. Securing NHS dental care for children and young people continued to be a challenge this year, an experience which other local authorities and parents share. In 2024-2025, further work is needed with health partners with a view to prioritizing access to NHS dental services for the children and young people we care for.

Further detail regarding health of Peterborough's cared for children and young people is set out in the report by the Designated Nurse Children in Care on behalf of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System.

Education

The education of the children we care for and young people transitioning to adulthood are supported by Peterborough Virtual School. On the 31st of March 2024, 388 (92%) children aged 0-18 years, including those in preschool settings, had a school place. Included in the 8% are UASC aged 16-18 years, for whom the priority is supporting them to learn English as a second language which will provide them the maximum opportunity of being able to engage in more formal education.

Further detail regarding education, employment and training is set out in the Virtual School Annual Report 2023-2024 which should be read in conjunction with this report.



Virtual School Annual
Report 2023-2024.pd

Young People transitioning to adulthood – Care Leavers

In touch - This year, we were in touch with 100% of young people aged 17-19 years, the method in which we were in touch with them is not reportable in 2023-2024 however this could be in person, letter, email, telephone call. We were in touch with 88% of young adults aged 19-21 years, and as with those aged 17-19 years, no young adults refused contact from us in 2023-2024. We were in touch with 100% of young

adults aged 22-25 years in 2023-2024, as above we are unable to report on the means, quality and impact of that contact.

Homes - The percentage of young people whose homes are considered suitable has declined by 8% to 80% and sits below our statistical neighbours (89%) and in England (88%). There are multiple layers which lead to accommodation being classed as unsuitable however reportable detail to aid understanding of unsuitability is not available for 2023-2024.

Local housing sufficiency and delayed commencement of post 18 planning with young people has left some Young People experiencing home moves that lack permanence for them. Personal Advisors continue to liaise with PCC housing and private housing providers regarding individual young people to endeavour to secure appropriate sustainable housing for them however options are limited meaning young people do not often have a choice of where they live. We recognise that there is further work with our housing partners and wider social housing agencies to address this in 2024 - 2025.

Education, employment and training - The number of young people in education employment and training was 46% in March 2023-2024, this is below our statistical neighbours (48.5%) and England (54%). Planning for post 18 education, employment and training has not commenced early enough for all of our young people and this has left many depending on state benefits.

The experiences of young people leaving our care are not those we would wish them to have. We are committed to improving the quality of service delivery by working with our children, young people, their carers and Care Leaders to ensure we understand their experiences in order to inform our improvement.

Advocacy

In September 2023, the Department for Education issued new statutory guidance to Local Authorities, 'Effective Advocacy for Looked-After Children, Children in Need and Care Leavers', this placed a new burden on local authorities to provide and 'opt out' advocacy offer to all children and young people who are the subject of Child in Need planning (Including Child Protection), children in care and care leavers.

The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) is a children's rights charity providing Independent Visiting and Advocacy Services for Peterborough's Children's in Care. This contract commenced on 5 February 2024 for an initial contract term of 3 years with an option to extend for a further 2 years; the contract is jointly commissioned with Cambridgeshire County Council.

In 2023/2024, 91 children and young people raised 104 issues with NYAS; some who raised more than one issue.

The top three primary reasons that children and young people accessed NYAS was to speak about complaints, Children in Care reviews and changes of placement. 55% of young people engaging with the advocacy service were located within Peterborough with the remaining children or young people living out of area.

73% of children and young people who raised an issue with NYAS were living in foster homes, supported accommodation homes or residential children’s homes.

NYAS achieved 100% engagement through 2023-2024. 65% of the issues were resolved, 22% were recorded as service was not provided (young person declined to engage with the process, or it was not deemed the appropriate time for support) and the remaining 13% were recorded to have been partly resolved.

Participation

Peterborough City Council has active participation arrangements through the Children in Care Council, the Children in Charge Youth Club, Peterborough Care Leaders and the Unaccompanied Children in Care Group. Children and young people also have their voices heard directly at the informal and formal corporate parenting committees where they are supported to scrutinise and hold officers and elected members to account.

A comprehensive and detailed report on the participation activity in Peterborough is below.



PCC Annual Participation Report 2

Key areas for service development 2024-2025

Priority	By Date
Review PCC Joint Housing Protocol to ensure it reflects local processes and responsibilities of housing services, children’s services and other PCC partners.	December 2024
Development activity for managers, social workers and personal advisors to drive aspiration and ambition for all the children we care young people with care experience to	March 2025

focus on supporting more young people into education, employment and training.	
In collaboration with the Centre for Professional Excellence, we will create an in-house training and professional development program for Personal Advisors. This initiative aims to enhance outcomes for young people and improve the quality and consistency of practice.	April 2025
Development of Social Workers and Personal Advisors to ensure a greater understanding of the mental wellbeing needs of children and young people, build on work with health partners to develop. This work will be led by the lead within the Clinical Team	June 2025
Ensure timely Initial and Review Health Assessments to identify changing health needs early and provide appropriate services to our children and young people	June 2025
We will deliver training on the completion of SDQs for foster carers, social workers and managers across corporate parenting services to ensure children and young people's emotional and mental health and wellbeing is consistently prioritised and reflected in care and pathway planning for Children and Young People.	May to July 2025
Ensure accountability to children and young people across the corporate parenting workforce using feedback from quality assurance activity and performance information to close the loop on learning and inform service wide training and development needs.	June to September 2025
Implement a system for capturing and reporting performance information to ensure that we, along with our partners, have a comprehensive understanding of the children and young people in our care, and to assess progress towards achieving better outcomes for them.	April 2025

1
5

This page is intentionally left blank