

Report

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2025 to 2026

Table of contents

Foreword.....	2
Our Children and Young People	5
Corporate Parenting Priorities – What have we achieved this year?	11
1: Nothing About Us Without Us	12
2: Education, Employment and Training	19
3: Healthy Mind and Healthy Body.....	22
4: A Place to Call Home	27
5: Safe, Connected and Thriving	32
Focus of the Corporate Parenting Board in 2026-2027.....	37

Foreword

As Cabinet Member for Children and Young People in South Gloucestershire, I am delighted to introduce our 2025-26 Corporate Parenting Annual Report. This report reflects a year of meaningful progress, strengthened partnerships and - most importantly - the voices and achievements of our children in care and our care leavers.

As a local authority, we take our corporate parenting responsibilities seriously and this commitment is shared by every internal team, service area and partner agency we work with.

Our young people have shaped much of this work directly through their involvement in the Experienced Panel in Care (EPIC) and the Teen Care Council (TCC). Their insight and honesty have been invaluable, and their influence can be seen throughout the year's developments.

The report highlights many successes: improved collaboration across the council, continued delivery of our Corporate Parenting Strategy (2025–28) and a growing culture of listening to (and most importantly, acting on) the experiences of the young people we support. It also reflects the dedication of our staff, corporate parents and carers, whose daily efforts ensure that children in our care feel safe, supported and secure enough that they're able to thrive.

Of course, we face challenges, as do all local authorities. But the overall picture is very much one of progress, resilience and shared purpose. I am proud of what has been achieved this year and grateful to every single person who has contributed to improving outcomes for our children and young people.

But most of all, I want to recognise the children and care leavers themselves. Their achievements, aspirations and determination continue to inspire me and drive our commitment to being the best corporate parents we can possibly be.

Cllr Simon Johnson

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People South Gloucestershire Council



Cllr Simon Johnson Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Corporate Parenting in South Gloucestershire: 'The background'

Introduction and Purpose of the Report

This report provides a summary of the activity undertaken by South Gloucestershire Council in relation to our children in care and care leavers during 2025–2026, the children for whom we are “corporate” parents. It highlights our achievements, learning and progress, alongside the barriers and challenges we have faced.

The purpose of the report is to offer an overview and evaluation of what has been delivered by the Corporate Parenting Board and its priority workstreams. These priorities are led by partners and key officers from across the local authority, working together to drive operational practice and progress against our shared responsibilities for children in care and care leavers, as set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy (2025–2028).

The report begins by explaining what it means to be a Corporate Parent, before outlining the role and membership of the Corporate Parenting Board. It then presents data relating to our current children in care and care leaver population, alongside analysis of key trends and insights. The report goes on to set out the progress and activity undertaken in relation to each priority area and concludes by identifying the key areas of focus for the year ahead.

What it means to be a Corporate Parent?

Caring for children and supporting care-experienced young people as they move into adulthood is one of the most important responsibilities of a local authority. Our statutory duties to children in care and care leavers are set out in the Children Act 1989 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 establish core corporate parenting principles which all local authorities must follow. For our children and young people, this means that we must:

1. Act in their best interests and promote their physical and mental health and wellbeing
2. Encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings
3. Help them access, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its partners
4. Promote high aspirations and strive to secure the best possible outcomes
5. Ensure they are safe, experience stability in their home lives, relationships, education or employment, and are well prepared for adulthood and independent living

Corporate parenting means that the whole council, alongside its public and private sector partners, takes collective responsibility for securing the best outcomes for children in care and care leavers. As corporate parents, we should seek to provide the same care, support and ambition that any good parent would offer their own child. At the heart of this is a continual commitment to asking ourselves: “Would this be good enough for my child?”

Being an effective corporate parent requires ambition, compassion and collaboration. It means working creatively and making the best use of our influence, resources and

partnerships to provide opportunities and consistent support, enabling our children and young people to thrive and become the best version of themselves.

The Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services (DCS) hold specific legal responsibilities to ensure that services for children in care and care leavers are delivered effectively and with care and compassion. As corporate parents, they play a vital role in promoting educational achievement, securing stable and high-quality placements, and ensuring thorough and timely planning for young people transitioning from care into adulthood.

What is the Corporate Parenting Board?

The role of the Corporate Parenting Board is to provide assurance and oversight of the corporate parenting system, ensuring that South Gloucestershire is an excellent corporate parent. The Board is committed to enabling all looked after children and care leavers to thrive and reach their full potential.

The Board's work is structured around five key priority areas, each with dedicated leads and a clear focus on actions, progress and addressing challenges. Meeting on a quarterly basis, the Corporate Parenting Board operates both strategically and operationally to drive improvement. It is chaired by Councillor Simon Johnson, Executive Member for Children and Young People, and includes councillors, council officers and partner agencies who work closely with children and young people across South Gloucestershire. A full list of Board members is provided in Appendix A.

The Board's work is underpinned by the Corporate Parenting Strategy (2025–2028), which sets out our shared commitments to children in care and care leavers, and how we will support, care for and advocate for them.

Our Promises to children and young people

South Gloucestershire Council has worked with children and young people to create 'Our Promises'. We are committed to listening to what they have to say and involving them in decisions that affect their lives and in decision making across the Council regarding the services provided to them. Our Promises relate to following key themes:

Important People: We will ask you which people are important to you and ensure you keep in contact with them if it is safe to do so

Being Involved and Listening: We will make sure that you are involved in the plans we make with you about your future. We will ask for your opinion and take account of what you say.

Having Somewhere to Live: We will make sure that you have somewhere to live and can make it your home.

Helping you know about what you need: We will provide you with information about your care, new opportunities and your rights.

Help to Create a Good Future for me: We will support you to discover your talents and abilities and find ways for you to make the most of these.

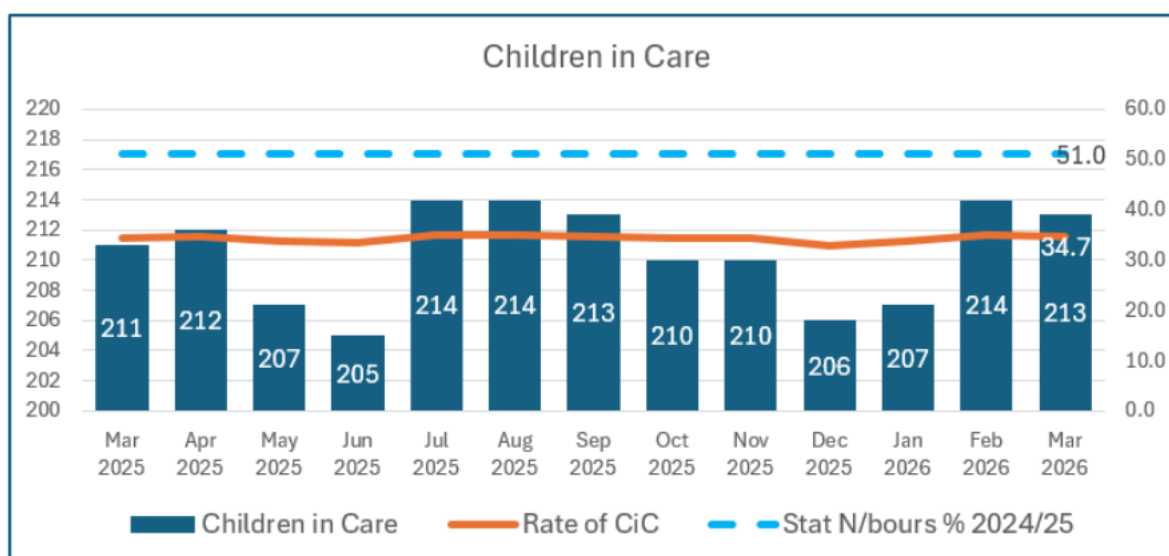
Our Children and Young People

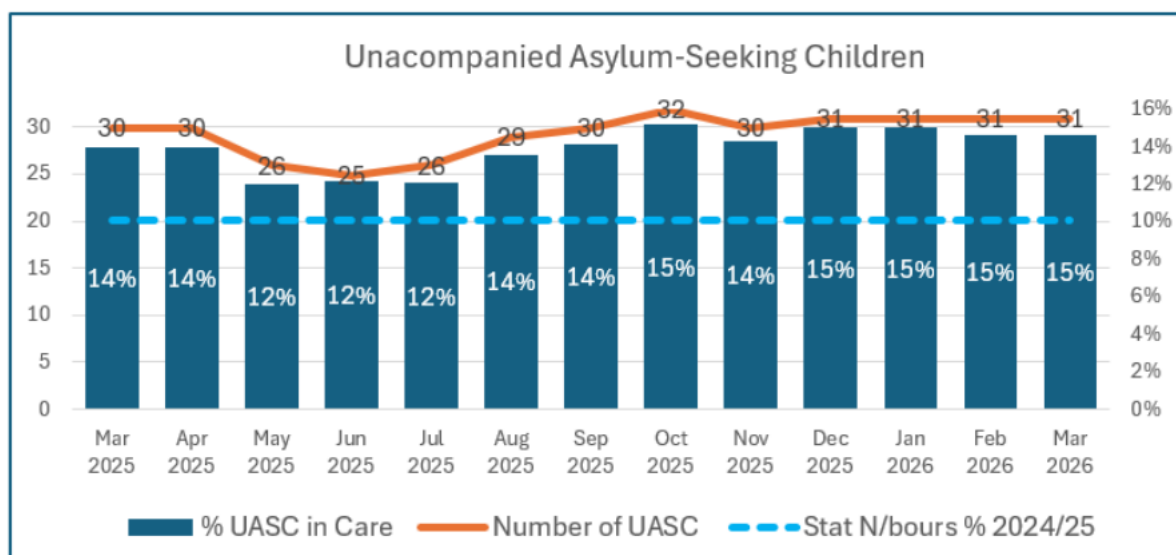
Who are our Children in Care?

Children in Care 2025/26:	
Children in Care on 31st March 2026.	213
Children entering care between Apr2025-Mar2026.	94
...Of which the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking entering care.	16
Children leaving care between Apr2025-Mar2026.	92

The number of children in the care of the local authority is very similar to at this point last year when the previous annual report was written. As is set out in the table below the number of children in care has remained relatively stable across the year.

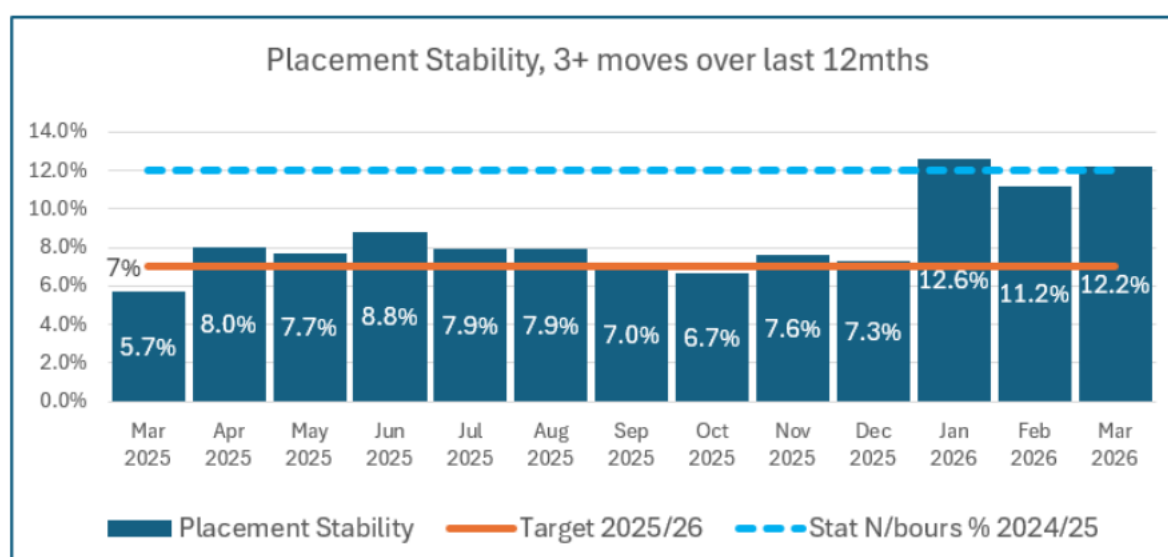
Encouragingly the rate of our children in care per 10,000 is this year again below that of our statistically neighbours being at 34.7 as compared to 51.0. Whilst the reasons children enter care vary and every child's situation is unique what this tells us is when compared against similar local authorities, we are not inappropriately or disproportionately bringing too many children into care – reflecting our values that all children are best cared for within their families and networks, where this is safe and appropriate for them to be so.





As the above graph demonstrates, a proportion of our children in care are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Most of these children enter our care via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) which is a mandatory UK government mechanism designed to safely transfer unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from entry local authorities (like Kent) to other councils across the UK. It seeks to ensure a fairer distribution of care responsibilities across all Local Authorities. As a Local Authority we take our responsibility to this scheme, and the children who enter our care via this mechanism seriously and have good systems in place for how we receive, seek appropriate homes for and then support these children ongoing. Whilst we do care proportionally for more unaccompanied, asylum-seeking children than statistically neighbours this year has seen a reduction as compared to last year of the number of children allocated to us via the NTS.

Placements

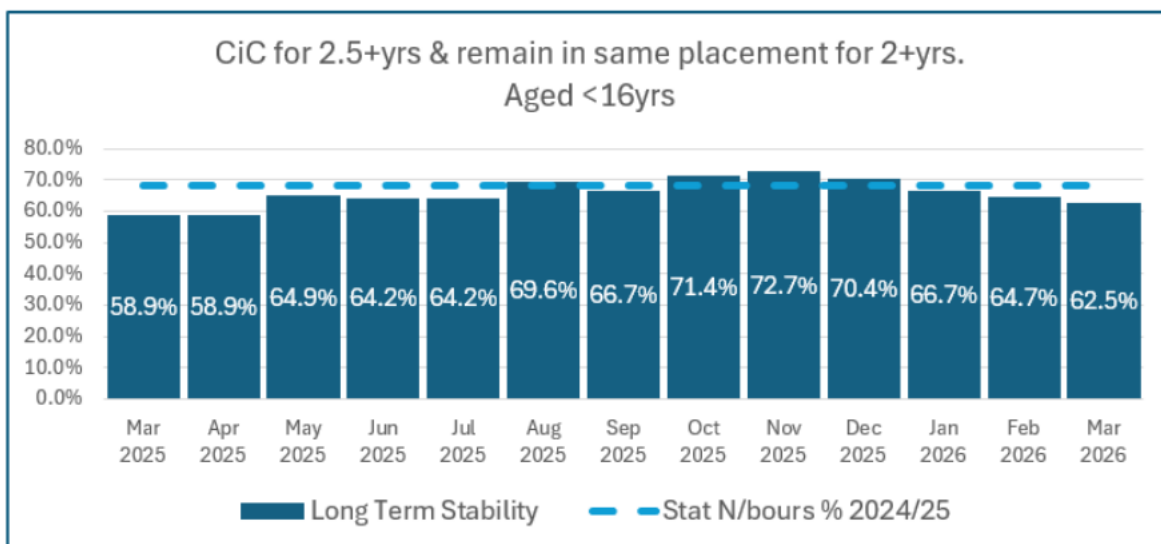


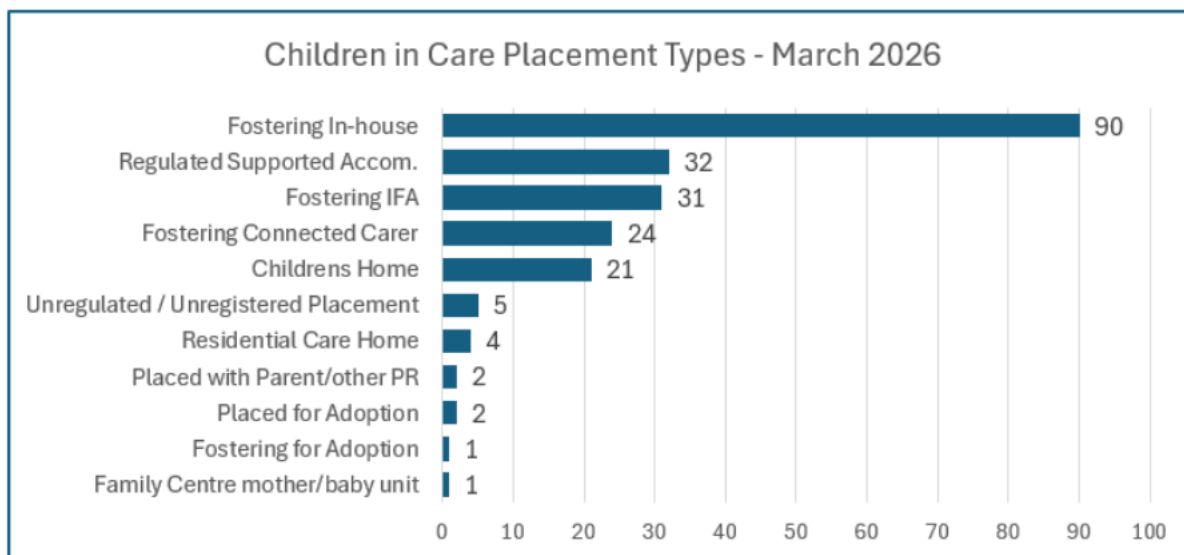
We know, from research and the voices of our children in care, that having a stable home and not constantly moving is central to wellbeing and good outcomes. Whilst some placement moves can be appropriate and part of a young person's care plan, for example

as part of a transition back into the care of their family, to enable a child to get the specialist care they need or as part of a young person's journey to adulthood/independence our ambition always is to seek to avoid unnecessary moves for young people between different homes. The data in this graph above points to a significant increase in multiple moves for young people from this January. This followed work undertaken to seek to ensure we were accurately capturing all placement moves. This work has helped us to identify that earlier data collection processes did not fully capture placement moves, providing clarity on the results and informing stronger data accuracy going forward.

Stability for young people is focus across our locality, children in care, fostering and commissioning services. In September 2025, our Heads of Service completed an audit into children who had experienced multiple moves, looking to see what learning could be taken from the experiences of those children who had unfortunately experienced multiple moves. The learning from this has been fed into the appropriate teams as we look to ensure no child has to be experience any more moves than is necessary.

The graph below highlights that long-term stability remains strong for most of our children, with only a recent and comparatively small variation against our statistical neighbours.

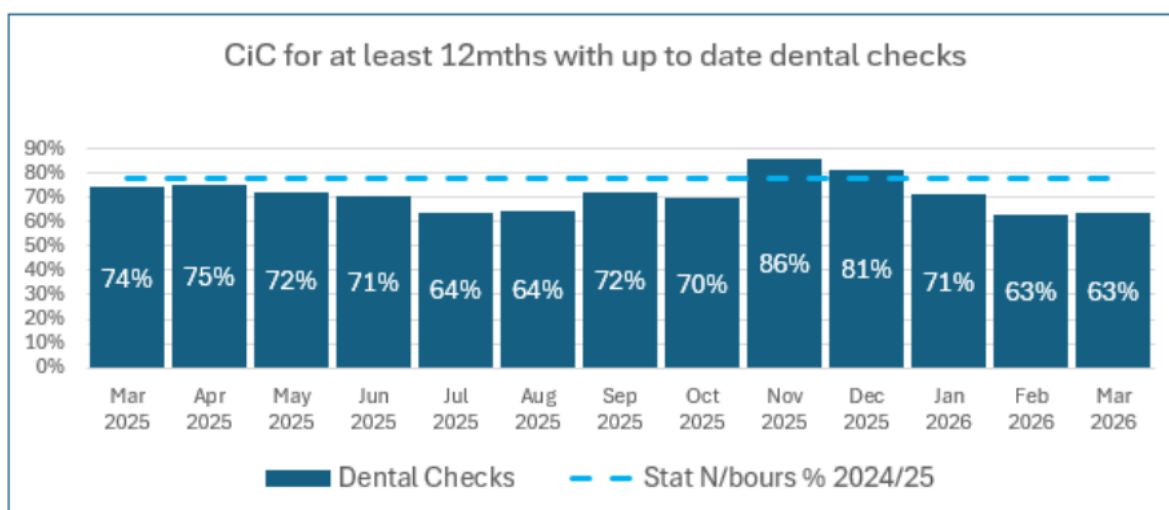


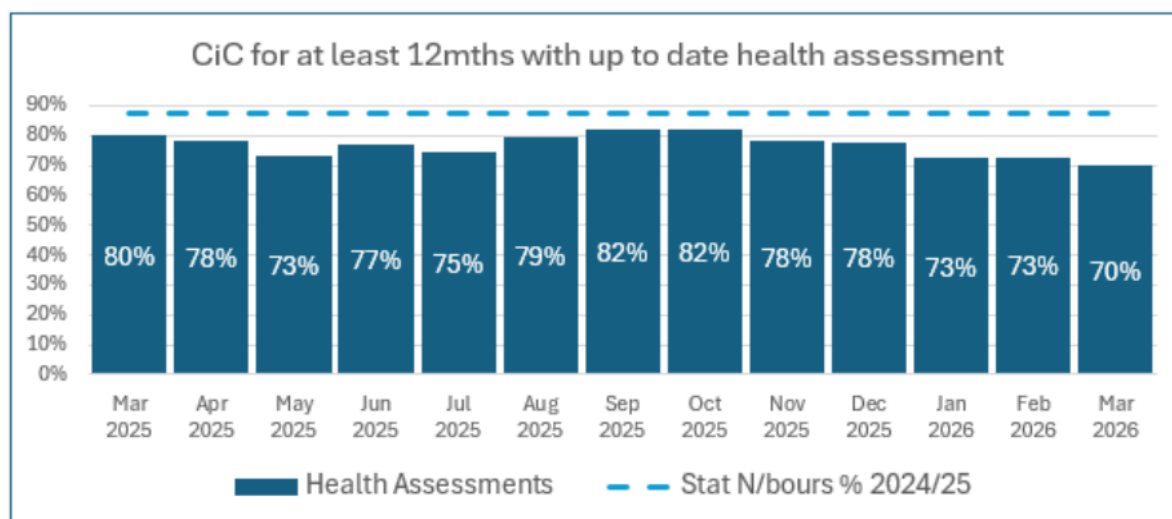


The above graph sets out most of our young children are cared for by our own South Gloucestershire foster carers. In addition, we have 24 children being cared for by connected carers (i.e. a family member or someone from their kinship network) and supported by our fostering service. Where we can not find homes for children or young people within our own cohort of foster carers we work alongside our partners in the independent sector to find the right foster homes for our children.

Our ambition is always to support children to be cared for within family, home environments however a number of our children do require specialist children's homes to meet their needs. We also have a proportion of young children who, as part of their transition into adulthood are cared for in either semi-independent or supported housing provision as set out above.

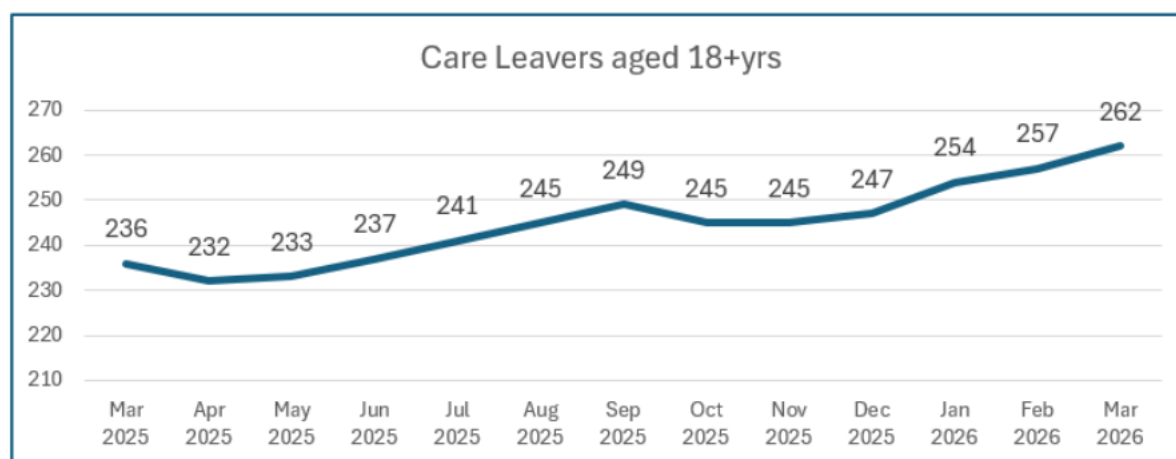
Dental and Health Assessments for our children in care:





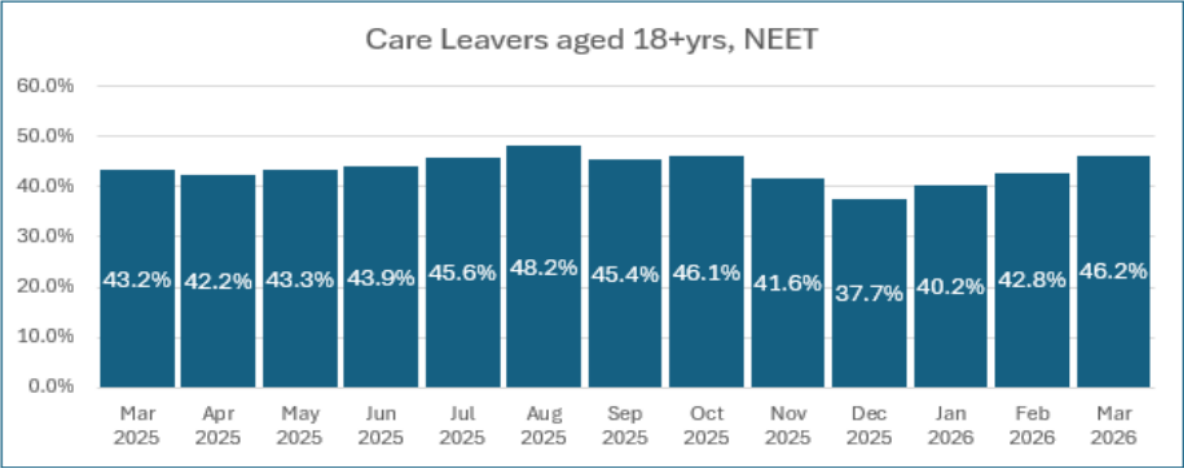
Over the past year we have been working to try and improved our performance in relation to the timeliness of our children in care receiving their annual health assessment and our oversight of their accessing dental care. We now have improved administrative processes in place, including monthly meetings between the Corporate Parenting Service Manager, our Business Support Team and our Named Children in Care Nurse. Although this work initially appeared to be having the desired impact on performance, this then dipped towards the end of the year both in respect of dentals and health assessments. A review of the action plan was recently undertaken involving Head of Service, and a renewed focus has seen performance improve in April. Maintaining good oversight and overall performance remains a focus of all involved with the ambition of matching our statistical neighbours within 3 months and seeking to then maintain that across the rest of the upcoming year.

Who are our Care Leavers?



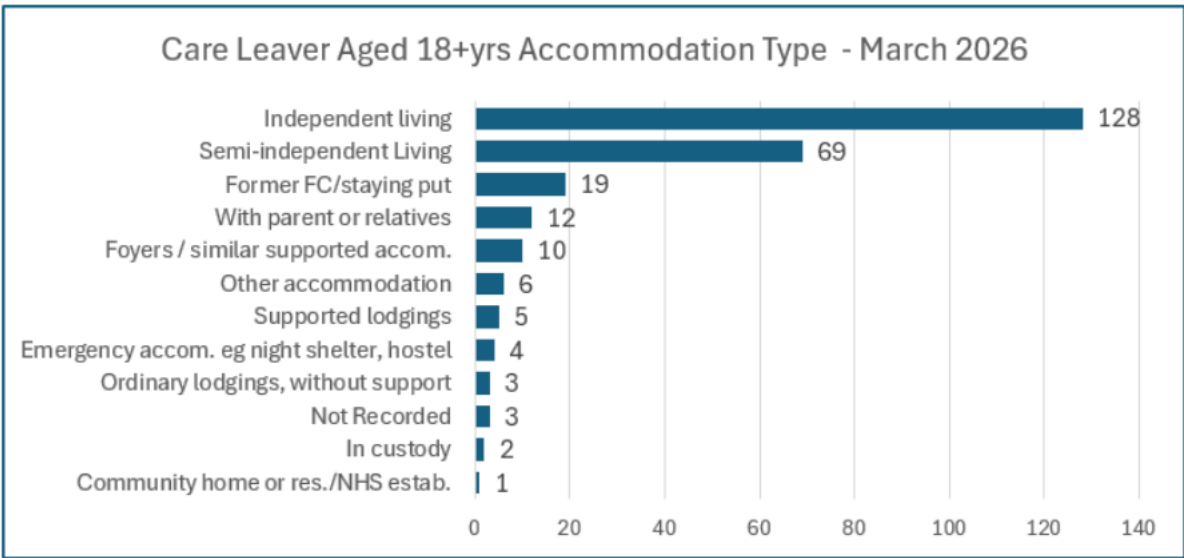
The number of care leavers open to our service has continued to rise across the year. In part this reflects that we have had a large cohort of young people turn 18 in the last year, including a proportion of our unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. However, it also reflects that a larger proportion of our young adults are choosing to remain open to our service, including beyond 21 when previously our involvement might have ended. This increase in young adults open to the service has seen the number of young people open

to Personal Advisors increase. As a result there has been a shift in resourcing and further investment in Personal Advisors in the Care Leavers team, with two new PA's recently starting with the service. This has been put in place to further improve the quality of service offered to our care leavers, and respond to the feedback from our recent OFSTED Focus visit (further detail below).



Towards the end of 2025 the number of care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) dipped below 40%. Whilst our ambition is to have every care leaver in education, employment and training (EET) our target is to work towards consistently matching the national average of having 60% of care leavers in education in EET i.e. 40% NEET. The improvements we saw between November and January reflected the outcome of focused worked undertaken across services, with detail around the different work completed set out below. Unfortunately, despite focused efforts this positive trajectory has not been maintained. We are working to undertake further analysis of how we had achieved improvements and exploring how we build on what works as part of our ambition to be the best possible corporate parent, in getting as many of possible of our young people into EET.

Placements for Care Leavers



Supporting our care leavers to move into their own homes, at a time that is right for them, is often one of the key focus for our Personal Advisors in their support and Pathway Planning with all our care experienced young people. As part of our Local Offer all Care Leavers receive Band A priority status for South Gloucestershire's HomeChoice, meaning they are eligible to bid and are supported into appropriate social tenancies from when they turn 18. We have a Care Leavers Housing Protocol in place which sets out how we work together with our HomeChoice team to support young people, both as they move into their property but also how we work together to support young people to maintain their tenancies.

Utilising tools such as the Passport to Independence work in preparing our young people to move on into independence starts before they are 18. Social Workers and Personal Advisors, working with the support of our Housing Transitions worker identify with our young people the best accommodation options for them. Whilst some are ready to move into their own properties shortly after 18, others require more support initially – for example via our Support Housing Pathway.

As the above graph demonstrates the vast majority of our young people are living in their own accommodation, whilst a proportion remain on a journey to independence as denoted by those captured under the Semi-Independent living data point. We continue to support some young people to remain with their foster carers, via our Staying Put offer as well as some young people living in supported lodgings alongside one of our supported lodgings host.

More information is provided below in terms of what our Commissioning team is doing in supporting us identify and expand our housing options to our care experienced young people.

Corporate Parenting Priorities – What have we achieved this year?

We continue to build on our strengths by actively listening to children and young people, responding to their feedback, and working collaboratively across council services and partner organisations to drive continuous improvement. Our commitment remains clear: to provide the highest quality care, support and opportunities for every child and young person in South Gloucestershire.

During the past year, we reviewed and launched a refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy, introducing five key priorities that will guide our work across the council and with our partners. These priorities, and the progress made against them, are explored in more detail throughout this report. The report can be read in more detail here [Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025 to 2028](#)



The Ofsted focused visit (February 2026) found that South Gloucestershire Council is strongly committed to meeting the needs of care leavers and has significantly strengthened its local offer, extending support to all care leavers up to age 25 and investing in its Personal Advisor workforce. Care leavers benefit from stable, experienced staff who build strong relationships and provide practical and emotional support across areas such as accommodation, health, education, employment and wellbeing. Leaders and corporate parents demonstrate effective oversight and prioritisation of care leavers. However, Senior leaders are aware that a small, but important number of practice areas around managing risk, the quality of pathway plans, and supervision need further improvement and there are plans in place, which are progressing at pace, to address these.

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the priorities that guide our work. This report highlights what we've achieved so far and outlines our ambitions for the year ahead as we continue to strengthen and improve the services we provide.

1: Nothing About Us Without Us

Our Goal: Working together with you to shape the services and decisions that affect your life. Making sure we hear your voice, listen to your feedback and use this to ensure we are the best corporate parent we can be for you.

What have we achieved this year?

Participation Team

Here is South Gloucestershire Council, we have 2 groups dedicated for children in care and care leavers.

- **EPIC (Experienced Panel In Care):** A group of care-experienced young people and care leavers who work with the council to influence policies, services, and decisions that affect their lives. They lead projects, share lived experiences, and advocate for change.
- **TCC (Teen Care Council):** A group for children and young people currently in care. TCC provides a platform for them to share their views, shape services, and take part in consultations. Members help co-design projects and improvements that directly impact their care experience

Supported Living Conference- Members of EPIC gave their lived experience about their time in supported living. They recorded their voices and this was edited into a video that was presented at the Supported Living Conference in December 2025. The video has also gone on to be used as training for different supported accommodation providers.

Corporate Parenting Board Strategy- Young people from both TCC and EPIC contributed their own foreword to the new strategy in which they set out their own priorities and advice for professionals working with young people.

Care Leaver Transition Guide- Supported Care Leaver Project Manager to write and design a young people's guide to transitioning from care to being a care leaver which is now given to all children in care in their transition journey.

Welcome Pack for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers- Members of EPIC who are UASC worked with Practice Development Manager to offer their insights and feedback on what knowledge and advice unaccompanied young people need to have when arriving in South Gloucestershire.

Corporate Parenting Board Interviews- EPIC has written, conducted and filmed interviews with members of Corporate Parenting Board in order to remove barriers and build relationships. These interviews are shared in the Care Leaver Newsletter and on the council's YouTube channel.

Welcome Hampers for new young people in residential homes- EPIC members have created personalised welcome hampers for young people who have moved into the three new residential homes. For each person, EPIC has designed the questionnaire, shopped for supplies and created a handwritten welcome letter.

Relationships Booklet- TCC have helped to design and write a booklet for foster carers to enable them to have conversations about safe and healthy relationships with the young people in their care.

Independent Reviewing Officers and Review Meetings- Members of TCC asked to design a presentation for the IRO team giving their lived experiences of working with IROs in order to highlight great practice and question where this wasn't always consistent. Members of TCC designed their own activities in order to gather and organise feedback from the group. This was all presented to the Quality Assurance and Reviewing Manager by the young people. As a result the IRO team have implemented a set up some bottom line guidance to ensure that all young people receive the same consistent offer and will be working on how child in care review minutes are written to young people in care.

Fostering Recruitment- Both TCC and EPIC have designed their own questions and success criteria that should be used by the recruitment panel when interviewing new foster carers. They have also designed their own leaflet about what young people want in a foster carer that will be given to prospective foster carers.

Foster Carer Reviews- Young people in TCC have begun work on developing a young people's animation to explain the purpose of a foster carer review, the importance of the voice of the young people in their care and the different ways they can contribute.

Opportunities for Care Leavers

We have created a wide range of opportunities for care leavers with local partners and within our team throughout 2025–26.

We regularly host quarterly partner events that bring together local organisations, businesses, Personal Advisors and young people. These events provide opportunities for young people to connect directly with partners, explore current and upcoming opportunities, and build confidence in accessing services themselves. Partners who have attended include ASDA, The King's Trust and 1625ip Mentoring, and feedback from both young people and professionals has been very positive.



In May, we opened Martins House, a welcoming space where young people can drop in weekly to meet with their PAs. The space enables young people to develop independence skills such as cooking, doing laundry, applying for jobs and managing paperwork. Young people can also access an on-site food bank, which was set up specifically to support those who are uncomfortable using community food banks. The food bank receives regular donations from council staff, with a dedicated donation point at the BMR office, and supports young people weekly with food and toiletries.

In July, we delivered our Champion Awards, celebrating the achievements and resilience of children in care and care leavers. The event was a real success attended by over 100 children and young people and hosted by corporate parenting members. Over 300 certificates and medals were awarded, with winners selected by the Director of Children's Services and young people from the Participation Team.



Our partnerships with local businesses have continued to grow, with organisations increasingly using their social value commitments to support care leavers. Through this, Bytes generously donated 10 brand-new iPads and accessories to young people preparing for university, college, and online courses. Young people expressed how valued and surprised they felt to receive new equipment, which supported both their education and confidence.



As a team, we have engaged in training sessions with local partners covering changes to DWP and benefits, the asylum-seeking journey, and updates to national policy. This has strengthened staff knowledge and professional confidence. We have also held internal discussions on key practice areas, including post-18 work with the Virtual School and Staying Put arrangements between foster carers and young people. Our team away day further helped to set clear priorities, with a strong focus on keeping young people safe and supporting them into employment.

During National Care Leaver Month, we hosted a celebration event involving over 15 local businesses and partner services, including DWP, Substance Misuse Services, Participation, Bridges App developers, Ree's Foundation and One Stop Shop. Young people were able to access information, explore offers, engage with services and take away a range of freebies. We also celebrated We Care Day with staff pledging their support to young people with care experience.



We also run regular social and cultural events to promote wellbeing and connection. This year, activities have included Go Ape, ice skating, Eid celebrations with over 20 young people, and a Christmas event attended by more than 50 young people. Christmas

donations were our most successful to date, with over 50 stockings created and staff volunteering their time to wrap gifts, ensuring young people felt celebrated and supported.



To look back our highlights from 2025 please visit this link [Care Leavers 2025](#)

Local Offer

We are committed to ensuring that our Local Offer is as accessible, flexible and responsive as possible to meet the diverse needs of all Care Leavers. To support continuous improvement, we undertook visits to neighbouring local authorities to review their Local Offers and drop-in provision. During these visits, we met with team managers, Personal Advisers and young people to learn from effective practice and to openly discuss shared challenges.

In October, we benchmarked our Local Offer against a number of Outstanding local authorities. While this exercise confirmed that our offer compared well and required relatively few changes, it also reinforced our ambition to continue strengthening and expanding support for Care Leavers.

Alongside this, we conducted structured feedback sessions with young people, providers and staff to ensure developments were informed by lived experience and frontline insight. Feedback was gathered through surveys, EPIC engagement, the EET Panel, housing providers, and Personal Adviser team meetings. This collective feedback directly shaped the enhancements launched in January 2026.

To improve transparency, consistency and equitable access to support, we introduced a refreshed Local Offer Financial Guide. The guide clearly sets out Care Leaver entitlements, agreed thresholds, approval processes and payment methods, alongside revised cost centres and codes. This has strengthened oversight, improved consistency in decision-making and enabled better tracking of take-up to inform future development.

The guide sets out comprehensive housing-related support, including deposits and rent in advance for first tenancies, the £3,000 Setting Up Home Allowance, council tax exemptions up to age 25, TV licences, storage and removal costs, and a supported accommodation employment rent top-up of up to £70 per week for a maximum of four months.

A wide range of education, employment and training support is also detailed. This includes a £2,600 annual university bursary, support with out-of-term accommodation, graduation

payments and ceremony costs, apprenticeship wage top-ups to ensure earnings meet the National Minimum Wage, up to £400 for work and training costs, and paid work experience opportunities.

The guide clearly outlines rights and entitlements, including birthday and celebration payments, emergency payments, clothing support, replacement ID and mobile phones, asylum-related travel documents, British citizenship support, and transitional personal allowances following a young person's 18th birthday. Emergency payments have been standardised, enabling young people to access £30 payments up to six times per year, supported by budgeting conversations and food bank referrals where appropriate.

There is a strong focus on community, wellbeing and participation, with support available for gym and leisure memberships, care-experienced parents, transport, driving lessons and tests, custody support, Wi-Fi and phone data. These offers promote independence, inclusion, emotional wellbeing and sustained engagement in education, employment and community life.

Alongside the introduction of the Financial Guide, a number of targeted improvements have been implemented during 2025–26 in direct response to young people's feedback. These include enhanced apprenticeship wage support, increased parent support payments, strengthened custody resettlement arrangements, simplified access to gym memberships, paid work experience options and greater flexibility around work and training costs.

The Bridges App continues to play a central role in promoting the Local Offer. Young people use the app to understand their entitlements, access updates, newsletters, events and opportunities, and provide direct feedback to the Care Leavers Project Manager. This co-productive approach ensures the Local Offer remains visible, relevant and responsive.

Further developments are underway, including pilot counselling provision for ten young people, the development of ESOL courses, expansion of accredited and online learning opportunities, continued development of Martin's House and the Engagement Worker role, Bridges App focus groups, an identity focus group with the Diversity Trust, and opportunities for Care Leavers to become mentors to others.

Bridges App

The South Gloucestershire Bridges App continues to be a highly effective digital tool supporting care leavers to access information, entitlements, opportunities and support. Since December 2024, the app has reached 1,129 users, with 1,120 interactions recorded in 2025, demonstrating strong and increasing engagement from young people and professionals. Over 63 updates have been shared, ensuring content remains current, relevant and responsive to need. Engagement has grown significantly, with sessions increasing and an average session length of over three minutes, indicating purposeful and meaningful use.

The app provides 24/7 access to information and guidance across key areas including housing, managing money, health and wellbeing, education, training and employment. It supports young people to clearly understand and access their care leaver entitlements, and includes a Mental Health Hub with over 100 resources, real-time apprenticeship vacancies, local job opportunities, events, discounts, offers and details of local support services.

Regular newsletters, events and opportunities are shared through the app, helping young people stay informed and connected.

Young people actively use the app to share feedback directly with the Care Leavers Project Manager, ensuring their views help to shape ongoing development and content improvements. This co-productive approach has strengthened trust, relevance and engagement. The app also supports accessibility and inclusion, with content available in seven languages and offline functionality once downloaded.

Feedback from young people highlights that the app helps them find support, plan budgets and access opportunities in one place, while Personal Advisers report improved engagement, independence and confidence. The Bridges App continues to evolve through co-design with young people and professionals, ensuring it remains a reliable, accessible and trusted resource for care-experienced young people.



Protected Characteristics

Since approval of the motion to treat care experience as a protected characteristic in July 2024, our aim has been to provide strategic oversight, coordination and challenge across agencies in recognising and responding to care experience as a protected characteristic. The group brings together neighbouring local authorities and partner organisations to reduce disproportionality, improve outcomes and ensure equitable access to services for care-experienced young people.

Group Objectives

- To develop and review a joint action plan that delivers pace and meaningful change for care-experienced individuals, particularly in reducing disproportionality and improving outcomes.
- To serve as a forum to support and hold partners to account in relation to our shared commitments to care-experienced young people.
- To review and analyse data relating to care-experienced individuals, including disproportionality by gender, ethnicity, disability and access to services, as agreed through the action plan.
- To identify and address systemic barriers and inequalities affecting care leavers.
- To ensure care-experienced individuals are considered within equality impact assessments and strategic planning.
- To promote care-experienced lived experience and co-production in service design and delivery.

- To explore opportunities for collaboration with neighbouring local authorities.

Corporate Parenting E-module

To support new council staff understanding the role they have as corporate parenting, a new e-module was developed which is mandatory to all new staff. The module has seen really good uptake from staff across the organisation. Informed by the voices of our care experienced young people, the module helps staff understand what it means to be a corporate parenting and the opportunities this presents. The next step is to share and promote this learning resource with our partners in the year ahead, a number of whom have expressed an interest in utilising this resource.

2: Education, Employment and Training

Our Goal: Like any good parent, we are ambitious for you and what you can achieve, whatever that looks like for you – the sky is the limit! Everything we do will be about supporting you to progress working through barriers and challenges. We want there to be opportunities to suit everyone and we will support you along the way.

What have we achieved this year?

Virtual School

South Gloucestershire Virtual School support children and young people in care between the ages of 2 and 18. The Virtual School brings together information about children and young people who are in the care of South Gloucestershire as if they attend a single school.

South Gloucestershire Virtual School provide information and advice for children previously in care including those who have been adopted from care and those under special guardianship and child arrangement orders.

The Virtual School also has a strategic leadership role for children who have or have had a social worker (in the last six years). This responsibility commenced from 1st September 2021. South Gloucestershire Virtual School have appointed a lead teacher to oversee this work with oversight from the Virtual School Head.

Our Vision

- All children in care make better than expected progress.
- All children in care achieve at least in line with national expectations.
- All children in care have attendance at least in line with other pupils nationally.
- No children in care are permanently excluded from school.
- All Post 16 children in care progress to education, employment or training.
- South Gloucestershire's children in care have the best careers education programme in the country.
- Previously looked after children, their families and schools feel fully supported by The Virtual School.

- The Virtual School's extended duty for all children with a social worker is embedded within Education, Learning and Skills Development Plans and within social care teams.

2025/26 Highlights

- The Virtual School introduced an innovative School Review Programme which created a multi-agency approach to reviewing support in schools for all children under the Virtual School.
- 77% of Year 11 students achieved some formal qualifications with those who didn't being highly supported whilst in therapeutic environments.
- 100% of Year 11 students have an identified Post 16 destination
- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children have made good progress.
- Children with an EHCP have made excellent progress in school.
- Children with an EHCP have 91% attendance in school.
- Attendance in school is very good for most children, and children are happy in school.
- Exclusions from school are low.
- A Level results were fantastic with all young people completing them planning to go to university.

Education, Employment & Training for Care Leavers

Like any good parent, when our children reach 18, we want them to continue to learn, to achieve and to work towards a job or career from which brings them satisfaction, some meaning and will also offer them financial stability. After young people turn 18 supports around their education and training is led by Personal Advisor with support from our Transitions Pathways Co-Ordinator.

In section 1 of this document, the graph provided set out the percentage of our care leavers who were not in education, employment or training across the year. Our focus is on seeking to support as many of our young adults into Education, employment and training (EET) as possible – with our aim to match national rates which see's around 60% of care experienced young people in EET.

At time of writing of this report (beginning of May 2026)

Education

- 84 Care Leavers (25%) are studying full time at college or sixth form
- 18 Care Leavers (5%) are studying part time at college or sixth form
- 18 Care Leavers (5%) are studying full time at university
- No Care Leavers are currently studying part time at university level

Employment and Training

- 32 Care Leavers (10%) are in full-time employment or training
- 5 Care Leavers (2%) are undertaking apprenticeships
- 35 Care Leavers (10%) are engaged in part-time employment or training

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

- 30 Care Leavers (9%) are NEET due to illness or disability

- 20 Care Leavers (6%) are NEET due to pregnancy or caring responsibilities for young children
- 93 Care Leavers (28%) are NEET for other or multiple reasons and are in receipt of Universal Credit and/or associated out-of-work benefits

So what do we do to support our care leavers into Education, employment and training?

We are committed to ensuring that Care Leavers are able to access, participate in, and sustain education, employment and training (EET). Through strong, established partnerships with local employers, education providers and voluntary sector organisations, we create clear and supported pathways into apprenticeships, vocational training and paid employment. Our Local Offer sets out a comprehensive range of EET support, including provision for Care Leavers living outside South Gloucestershire. Live apprenticeship and employment opportunities are promoted via the Bridges App, including vacancies that offer guaranteed interviews for Care Leavers who meet the essential criteria.

Our Joint SEND and Care Leaver EET Strategy is focused on improving access to education, employment and training while addressing the barriers that can prevent sustained engagement. Working in close partnership with EHCP colleagues, we are developing more targeted, inclusive and flexible opportunities for young people with both care experience and SEND. This includes a well-established supported internship programme with Rolls-Royce, which has already enabled a young person with an EHCP and care experience to progress successfully. Further supported internship opportunities are currently being developed with Amazon and a local care home.

The Strategy is currently under review, with a strengthened focus on improving post-16 pathways and progression for both SEND learners and Care Leavers. As part of this work, Care Leavers have been given priority status at SEND Panel, which is expected to reduce delays in the EHCP process and support the timely identification and establishment of appropriate education and training placements.

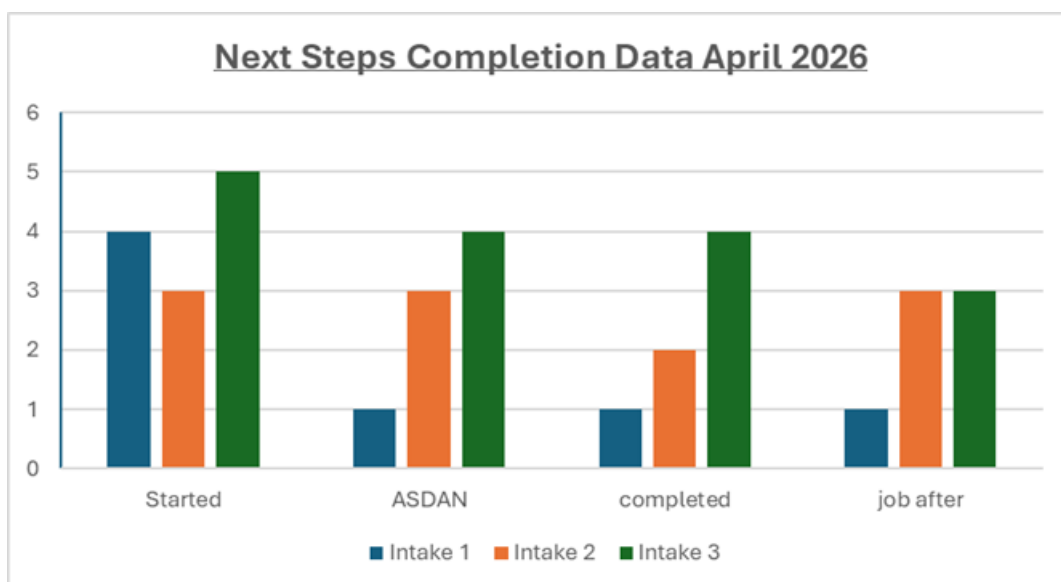
Next Steps Work Experience Programme

In the first year of delivery, the programme has successfully run three additional intakes since the previous report. This brings the total to four intakes overall, with 15 young people participating to date.

As part of the programme, young people are offered the opportunity to take part in an educational element through the ASDAN Employability Skills qualification. To date, we have achieved a 53% success rate for this qualification.

A range of work placement opportunities are available to support young people in gaining practical experience. These include placements with the dog warden service, IT desk support, café services, and the Handy Van service. Overall, 60% of young people have successfully completed a work placement.

Over the past year, 46% of participants have progressed into paid employment with the support of a job coach. Employment outcomes have included roles within shopping centres, café work, and apprenticeships with neighbouring authorities.



Learning from initial cohorts: Key lessons have been identified from the first cohorts, informing improvements to programme design and delivery.

Senior Mentor role review: The Senior Mentor role has been removed while its purpose and value are reviewed.

Extended Job Coach support: An additional three months of one-to-one Job Coach support has been introduced post-programme to support participants into employment.

Programme impact: Overall, the programme has been effective in supporting care leavers who were previously NEET to move into employment following course completion.

EET Multi-agency Panel

The EET Panel has been successfully relaunched with strengthened governance and clearer strategic oversight. The panel takes place monthly chaired either by Head of Service or Service manager providing improved leadership, accountability and decision-making. The Panel operates as a robust multi-agency forum, bringing together colleagues from DWP, health services, EHCP teams, Youth Guarantee, ESOL providers and Personal Advisers. We discuss each young adults situation in detail, seeking to find creative solutions for how we support them to move into the right opportunities for them.

Improvements to agenda structure, clearer prioritisation which young people require urgent discussion and strengthened action tracking have significantly increased the effectiveness of the Panel. Actions are now supported by RAG ratings and named ownership, ensuring better follow-through and accountability. Dedicated time for meaningful multi-agency discussion has enabled more creative and personalised responses to need, including access to specialist interventions such as ADHD coaching.

3: Healthy Mind and Healthy Body

Our Goal: As a good parent, we want to be sure that you stay healthy, both physically and mentally. We acknowledge that as children in care and care leavers, you will be impacted

by your adverse childhood experiences and trauma. Together we will work to ensure you can get the help you need, when you need it so that you can live a healthy and fulfilling life.

What have we achieved this year?

To support the health and wellbeing of the children in our care, there are two key health teams who collaborate to assess and support their health needs, both as an individual child, whilst also taking a wider, systems approach. The Designated and Deputy Designated Nurse for Children in Care within the BNSSG ICB Safeguarding Team hold strategic oversight across all providers of health within the BNSSG ICB footprint, including the acute trusts, community providers such as health visiting, school nursing and GPs, mental health and ambulance services, advocating for children in care and care leavers across the systems, ensuring they are kept in mind with service design, procurement, funding and strategic planning to name but a few. As part of the ICB Safeguarding Team, they also work across the Safeguarding Children Partnerships, participating and sharing learning from serious incidents and keeping children in care and care leavers on the agenda of safeguarding system work.

The Sirona Children in Care Nursing Team, led by the Named Nurse for Children in Care work directly with the children to assess and support the individual health needs for our children via their Review Health Assessments.

The two teams work closely together, complementing each other to support the holistic wellbeing for the children in our care, working collaboratively to reduce health inequalities to improve outcomes, whilst promoting and advocating for a healthy future.

Across BNSSG ICB, many new projects have been undertaken of the past year. Many of these are reaching a point for review and development as outlined below.

Free prescriptions for care leavers

By offering free prescriptions, this will alleviate the financial burden of health care costs, allowing care leavers to allocate their limited resources to other essential needs such as housing, education and daily living expenses. With free prescriptions, care leavers are more likely to seek medical advice and adhere to prescribed treatments. This promotes preventative care, helping to catch and treat health issues early before they become more severe, thereby contributing to the overall well-being and stability of care leavers.

The ICB have committed to offering free prescriptions to eligible care leavers aged 18 until their 25th birthday.

In December 2025 the Government announced a new package of measures for young people leaving care will provide free prescriptions, dental and eyecare services up to their 25th birthday, and enhanced job opportunities in the NHS. The specifics of these offers is however still to be finalised.

Dental Pilot

A dental pilot for children in care who were unable to access a local dentist was launched in 2024 and is currently available until end of June 2026.

Difficulties with dental access is not just a local issue, but also a national one. Locally, the BNNSG dental commissioning team have worked with system partners and NHS England Southwest dental leads to design the current model to meet the needs of all BNSSG children and young people in care with trauma-informed approaches, longer appointment times and quieter waiting areas.

Since it started there have been 38 referrals from South Gloucestershire to this service.

Mental Health Support

The emotional health and well-being of our children in care and care leavers is key priority for the service. Thinking Aloud are available to support the emotional health and wellbeing of young people in care with a South Gloucestershire social worker. They believe that young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing will flourish if all the adults around them work together to understand how best to support them. They work towards this goal with all the adults who are already involved in the young person's life. Although most of their work is with the adults caring for children, they also work with young people. They can signpost or refer young people to other services if they better meet their needs.

Access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is an NHS service that helps children and young people under the age of 18 years, is also available. They provide assessment and support to children, young people and their families who are experiencing moderate to severe mental health difficulties. There is also access to a transitions team to help move from children's services to adult services smoothly.

Mental Health Work for Care Leavers – Update

Work is underway to better understand and improve mental health support for Care Leavers across the system. This has included raising the profile of Care Leavers within strategic mental health planning and advocating for improved data, as they are not currently clearly recognised within health inequalities frameworks. Engagement across system partners has helped ensure Care Leavers are increasingly considered within future service development. Extensive multi-agency engagement has taken place with ICB leads, providers, and partner organisations, alongside direct engagement with Care Leavers to understand lived experience. Early findings highlight gaps in consistent, trauma-informed support and variation in access to services, particularly for those with complex emotional needs and experiences of trauma.

Learning from safeguarding reviews reinforces the need for stronger multi-agency coordination, improved information sharing, and better recognition of mental health risk.

Next steps focus on strengthening data collection, embedding Care Leavers into commissioning, and improving trauma-informed practice across services. This work is being aligned with Children in Care pathways and multiple disadvantage programmes to support a more preventative, whole-system approach.

There is more information around support for care leavers within the Bridges SG App.

Health and Dental Assessments

Initial Health Assessments (IHA's)

The service has sufficient clinical capacity to offer Initial Health Assessments to all children entering care within the required timescales. Appointments are actively offered, and the service remains ready to respond promptly once referrals have been made. Over the past year, 37% of IHAs have been completed within the 20-day statutory timeframe. Where this timescale has not been achieved, this has largely been influenced by delays in referrals and, at times, the quality of information provided. Work is underway to refine referral systems and strengthen support for social workers, with a focus on improving the timeliness and accuracy of referrals and, in turn, increasing compliance with statutory timescales.

Review Health Assessments (RHA's)

Review Health Assessments continue to be delivered consistently, with significant effort invested in:

- Multiple contact attempts with carers
- Offering alternative appointments where needed
- Ensuring assessments proceed when arranged

There is proactive and persistent efforts of the service to engage carers and complete assessments. While engagement challenges exist, the data shows that contact and coordination improvements would further enhance efficiency and timeliness. As with IHAs, the service maintains adequate capacity to meet demand when engagement barriers are addressed.

A great deal of work has gone in seeking to improve co-ordination between Health and Children's services – and improved systems are embedding – but clearly more work needs to be done to try and further improve performance and timely health assessments for all children in care by continuing the joint work and ensuring referrals are being made in a timely way.

Preventative and Wider Health Outcomes

Dental Health

- **75% of children in care** have accessed a dental appointment within the last 12 months.

Immunisations

- **77% of children in care** are up to date with immunisations, indicating **good coverage but with room for improvement**

Additional Areas of note:

- **ADHD and Autism pathways:**
Children in care are actively monitored within the neurodevelopmental programme. While waiting lists remain under pressure, there is ongoing oversight and prioritisation for this vulnerable group.
- **Mental health screening – Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire's:**
There is currently poor completion rates of Strength and difficulties questionnaires but plans are in place to further promote easy online forms which will support carers to easily complete these.
- **Leaving care health summaries and passports:**
These are currently being co-designed with Care Experienced Young People, reflecting a strong commitment to co-production, relevance and improved transition outcomes.

Risk View – Strengths-Informed RAG Summary

-  **Statutory compliance:**
Initial Health Assessment timeliness remains below the 20-day requirement, highlighting a clear opportunity to make improvement
-  **Engagement:**
Carer contact and appointment uptake highlight clear opportunities where targeted action could deliver significant improvement
-  **Preventative health:**
Dental and immunisation coverage is good but with options for improvement.
-  **System coordination:**
More efficient notification and information sharing between social care and health will drive improved timeliness and efficiency Focus for Continued Improvement
- Build on existing partnerships to strengthen multi-agency notification processes, including entry into care and placement changes to deliver improvement in health assessment timeliness
- Continue our work with carers, to seek to improve timeliness of health assessments
- Continue to work to support social workers to Improve referral quality and timeliness
- Work to use digital systems to improve the update of Strength and difficulties questionnaires by carers and foster carers.
- Complete and implement the coproduced leaving care health summaries and passports

4: A Place to Call Home

Our Goal: You will have a safe, stable, and caring place to call home and live in an environment where you can thrive. Children in care will have access to high quality care and living arrangements. Housing options for care leavers will be individually right for them to move onto independent, stable living arrangements, when is right for you.

What have we achieved this year?

Fostering Service

WAYPOINT

WAYPOINT has continued to have meaningful impact on children, families and carers and has been recognised nationally as best practice.

WAYPOINT was a finalist at the Local Government Association (LGA) Awards in March 2025 and were highlighted for their impactful work from preventative edge of care work, keeping 'Families Together', to supporting our children and young people in residential settings with their 'Next Steps' towards fostering families or reunification home.

WAYPOINT was also highlighted by the DFE and presented to Parliament in Feb 2026 by Josh MacAlister OBE MP, Minister for Children and Families, as a model of best innovative practice within a fostering service, stating "WAYPOINT stands as a compelling example of how therapeutic, relationship-based practice embedded within fostering services can deliver meaningful reform, improved stability for children, and considerable value for local authorities."

Placement stability remains a key focus and in the WAYPOINT team we have staff dedicated to supporting foster carers in their care of young people.

Feedback received for Placement Stability support from WAYPOINT includes:

"(worker) is lovely and understands us whilst also giving us advice and options, which we take on board" (Foster carer).

"(worker) has been great since we have started working with her, she is a valuable link between us and (social worker)" (Foster carer).

The Inclusion and Adolescent Support Workers have continued to organise and facilitate group events for children of foster carers 4 times a year. These events provide a chance to reflect on the joys and challenges of being part of a fostering family, meet other children of foster carers, and enjoy activities together whilst building connections.

We hold in mind the central vision that a waypoint is 'a point at which a course can be changed' and this reflects the work around prevention and reunification, foster care stability, therapeutic life story work, and residential step downs.

Our feedback tells us that 97% of parents and foster carers are very satisfied with their WAYPOINT Worker's performance, feeling listened to, respected, and

positively impacted by the services provided. 100% of young people consistently felt that their WAYPOINT Worker does a good job of listening to them and treats them with respect. Additionally, they feel that their lives have improved since working with WAYPOINT.

WAYPOINT continues to aim to deliver targeted savings through three key areas:

Residential Step-Down

Every child who is stepped down from a residential placement to an IFA (minimal savings achieved) would achieve £276,276 savings a year.

Reunification

Every child safely reunified from an in house foster placement (minimal savings achieved) would achieve £28,860 savings a year.

Edge of Care Prevention

Every child prevented from entering an in house foster placement (minimal savings achieved) would achieve £28,860 savings a year.

Mockingbird

Mockingbird continues to grow with success too. In May 2025, we launched constellation 4 and in February 2026, we grew further, with constellation 5 launched. We have now identified hub carers for constellation 6 and aim to be launching by the end of May 2026.

By the end of our 25/26 financial year, we had 45 satellite families having joined mockingbird constellations. This is now 56% of our fostering families receiving Mockingbird support and this includes both mainstream and kinship foster carers.

Below is an overview of the level of support provided to Mockingbird constellations from the Hub Home carers:

Mockingbird Hub Support Provided (April 2025 – March 2026)

Type of Support	Total
In-person support to constellation families	267.5 hours
Planned sleep overs	133 nights
One-to-one telephone support contacts	264 hours
Other / Daytime support	35.2 hours

This year, our feedback tells us:

“I enjoy the adult talk as sometimes you can feel isolated and I especially love the feeling that it gives to the kids, mine see it as their family and that’s exactly how he refers to it, love it.”

“My Mockingbird hub lead has been particularly supportive and encouraging to me at a time when I was feeling unsure about my fostering career.”

“Regular meetings for adults and families, making new friends and having a new support group of people who understand the challenges and rewards of fostering”

78% of Satellite carers felt the support they received from Mockingbird was valuable.

44% of satellite carers that completed the Mockingbird survey said they may have otherwise considered resigning, had it not been for Mockingbird support.

Commissioned Services

We have recently re-commissioned a supported housing service which delivers support to 11 care leavers seeking asylum living in two shared houses in Patchway and Filton. The support delivered helps individuals to increase their independence by supporting them to establish the skills they need to embed into the local community, manage their accommodation and prepare for independent living. We are looking to increase capacity with a further two houses within the community to support this group of our young people.

The new support provider is 1625 Independent People who also run the Asylum seeking Support Service which supports individuals through the asylum and legal processes so this now provides continuity of support for young people and a seamless crossover of the two services.

We also continue to commission the resettlement support service which provides a higher level of tenancy support and resettlement support to care leavers who are making the transition to independent living. They are supported with setting up their home, budgeting and managing bills and finances and settling into their new area.

To support young people with their mental health and wellbeing we have recently started working with Network Counselling and Training to provide counselling sessions. They will offer steady, weekly emotional support in a safe and consistent space. Young people will get ten 50 minute sessions per person and sessions can be delivered face to face or online if needed.

The aim of the service is to support our young people to:

- Make sense of thoughts and feelings
- Feel less alone with what they’ve been carrying
- Build trust and feel safer with others
- Understand patterns that keep repeating
- Strengthen self-worth and confidence
- Find ways of coping that feel healthier or kinder

Through some funding from the Violence Reduction Partnership, we have partnered with EveryFamily to deliver healthy relationships workshops in our Supported Housing services. These workshops are open to all young people living in supported housing, not exclusively care leavers and have a focus on:

- What healthy relationships look like (includes conflict resolution)
- Recognising signs of abusive relationships
- The influence of media and social media - online bullying
- Body image and self-esteem

The aim is for young people to:

- Build confidence in expressing themselves
- Learn how to set boundaries and respect others
- Understand the importance of consent and communication
- Recognise the signs of unhealthy or abusive behaviour
- Develop empathy, emotional intelligence, and resilience

Children's Homes Project

We are pleased to report that all three South Gloucestershire children's homes are now fully open in partnership with Phoenix Child Care and Learning. All homes are fully staffed, Ofsted registered, and supporting children who are now living within the homes.

Importantly, several children and young people who were previously living out of area have been able to return to South Gloucestershire. This has provided them with the opportunity to come back to their local communities, with some returning to their previous schools and reconnecting with established friendships. Being closer to home has also strengthened family contact and supported ongoing family reunification where appropriate.

Early feedback shows significant benefits for children and young people living back in their local area. They are better able to access South Gloucestershire services, maintain strong educational continuity, and receive coordinated support through effective multi-agency working. This local approach has improved stability, emotional wellbeing, and outcomes for children by ensuring services work together around the child.

The opening of these homes represents a positive step forward for South Gloucestershire, demonstrating a strong commitment to providing high-quality, local care that prioritises children's needs, promotes stability, and supports long-term positive outcomes.

Independent Living and Supported Accommodation

In 2025, there were 32 active housing applications. This increased to 42 in 2026, indicating growing demand for move-on accommodation. Of the 2026 cohort, six applicants have received offers to date.

It is encouraging that increasing numbers of young people are expressing interest in, and demonstrating the skills required for, independent living. This reflects both improved readiness among young people and the effectiveness of the support provided in preparing them for this transition. Proactive steps are being taken to improve engagement and maximise opportunities for successful lettings, including targeted input from Personal Advisers, Team Managers, and the Housing Transition Coordinator. Continued monitoring of engagement levels, alongside timely and tailored support, will be essential to minimise missed opportunities and sustain positive housing outcomes for care-experienced young people.

There are currently 22 care leavers in Staying Put placements. The weekly fee paid to carers has increased to £306. Many care leavers in employment are benefiting from the South Gloucestershire Council Local Offer, which provides financial assistance to help cover rent where benefit entitlement is reduced due to earnings. This support has made Staying Put arrangements more affordable and has enabled young people to sustain their placements and continue receiving support from their former foster carers. Of the 22 young people in Staying Put placements, 11 are either in employment or attending university, demonstrating positive engagement with education and employment for this cohort of young people.

The Local Offer has been expanded to include additional support for care leavers, which is expected to have a positive impact on housing stability and long-term outcomes. Previously, young people in short-term supported accommodation often struggled to meet rent costs when entering employment due to reduced benefit entitlement. This created a risk of rent arrears and, in some cases, acted as a disincentive to seeking employment.

Under the enhanced Local Offer:

- Care leavers living in supported accommodation who begin apprenticeships can access additional financial support to ensure their income reaches the equivalent of the National Living Wage.
- Care leavers entering employment can claim additional funding to help cover rent costs while living in higher-cost supported accommodation.

These measures reduce financial pressure on working care leavers, support progression into employment and training, and improve the sustainability of supported accommodation placements.

There are currently 28 young people placed in short-term supported housing schemes in South Gloucestershire. Of these:

- Nine are assessed as ready to move into independent living, with one already offered social housing.
- Four have additional support needs and are engaged with the 1625 Independent People Intensive Support Service, which provides up to 10 hours of housing-related support per week, alongside input from the Housing Access Team to secure direct offers of social housing.

There are currently 25 care leavers in commissioned supported accommodation:

- All four UK nationals are actively bidding on HomeChoice. One young person is not currently residing in their accommodation and intends to move in with friends.
- Of the 20 unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers, the majority are progressing along their housing pathways, although with varying levels of readiness for independence. Four currently have no leave to remain, which impacts their housing options. Plans are in place to move a further eight young people awaiting immigration decisions into newly acquired supported accommodation in the next financial year.

There has been increased interest in this supported lodgings service over the last quarter, with a rise in referrals from both the Children in Care and Leaving Care teams. There are currently six active placements, one of whom has been offered a social housing tenancy. Two new placements were made during the last quarter.

Over the past six months, there have been nine nominations for vacancies within the service. Five young people were accepted; however, all declined the offer. To improve engagement and transitions, the Housing Transition Coordinator will work closely with Social Workers and Personal Advisers to ensure young people are better informed, prepared, and engaged with their housing pathway plans prior to nomination.

5. Safe, Connected and Thriving

Our Goal: We want all young people to feel accepted and that they belong in their community. Wherever possible, we will do all we can to support young people to be cared

for by those within their networks. Where this is not possible, we will ensure that all young people understand why they have come into care and support them to maintain and build lasting relationships with their family and network.

What have we achieved this year?

This was a new workstream added as part of the updated strategy in 2025.

Work has been undertaken with IRO team to agree a commitment to all children in care whereby creative ways of supporting children's links with wider networks and important people in their lives and these relationships will be considered as part of all child in care reviews.

Work has been undertaken to identify all children where a return home might be realistic, and this has led to plans being developed which are supporting this. It has been agreed that a Family Group Conference will be offered to families to support the development of a family led plan to enable a return home. All these children, and their potential journey's towards reunification continue to be tracked by our updated Permanence Panel, which seeks to support and drive forward creative and child focused plans to support children home where this is appropriate.

Auditing work planned within this workstream has been achieved and an action plan is in place to address the identified findings.

IRO Service

A Summary of the role of the IRO

In South Gloucestershire the Independent Review Officer (IRO) role is undertaken by Quality Assurance Managers who have a dual role of reviewing Children in Care and chairing Child Protection Conferences. This report focuses on their role in respect of Children in Care and refers to them as IROs throughout. Every child who is in care must have a care plan which details the long-term plan for the child's upbringing and the arrangements made by Children's Services to achieve this and meet the child's day to day needs.

The task of the IRO is to regularly review this care plan in accordance with statutory timescales through Children in Care reviews to ensure each child's needs are being met. In doing this the IRO provides independent oversight of both the care provided to individual children and the local authority's performance as a Corporate Parent, identifying concerns around specific cases and themes in relation to care planning, bringing these to the attention of senior managers who, as corporate parents, are required to act as a responsible and conscientious parent would for their own children. They need to ensure that the care plan fully reflects each child/young person's needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authorities' legal responsibilities towards the child/young person. IROs have a duty to listen to the young person's voice (wishes, feelings, and experience) as their care plan develops.

Focus of the IRO's over the last year

- The team have continued to ensure children are an integral part of every child in care and pathway plan review and are seen and spoken to regularly. Children are encouraged to attend their reviews with further work being done to encourage them to chair their reviews.
- Midway checks for children in between reviews and oversight recorded on children's records has continued to see growth, evidenced by monthly team audits which show high numbers of 'Good' audits and several 'Outstanding' audits undertaken.
- We have continued to use direct work tools, consultation forms and MOMO app to seek children's views. As an IRO team we have been one of the highest users of MOMO across the department.
- The team have been working closely with TCC, our Teen Care Council, this is following a presentation by TCC to QARU SM regarding the service they receive from their IRO's, this included the things they liked and strengthens and areas they wanted us to improve. Following this presentation the team have agreed 'bottom lines' so all children in care are offered the same service from every IRO. This has been shared with TCC.
- Significant progress in the timeliness of CIC reviews being undertaken and them being written up within timescale has continued over the last year.
- An area of focus for the team has been strengthening connections for children with family and friends and wider networks. A team 'commitment' has been agreed which highlights the importance of IRO discussing connections at every review for children. This 'commitment' has been shared with both fostering and children in care teams.

Quality Assurance

The Quality Assurance (QA) service plays a crucial role in overseeing the work and support provided to children and young people in care. By offering detailed insights, the QA team highlights both strengths and areas needing improvement through learning. Through thorough evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of our processes, systems, and practices, the team helps us identify successful strategies that should be continued and expanded. This approach ensures that we focus on what works best, fostering continuous improvement and enhancing the overall quality of care and support provided to children and young people.

In relation to Children in Care and Care Leavers QA activity over the past year has had a specific focus on safety planning, assessments and response to risk.

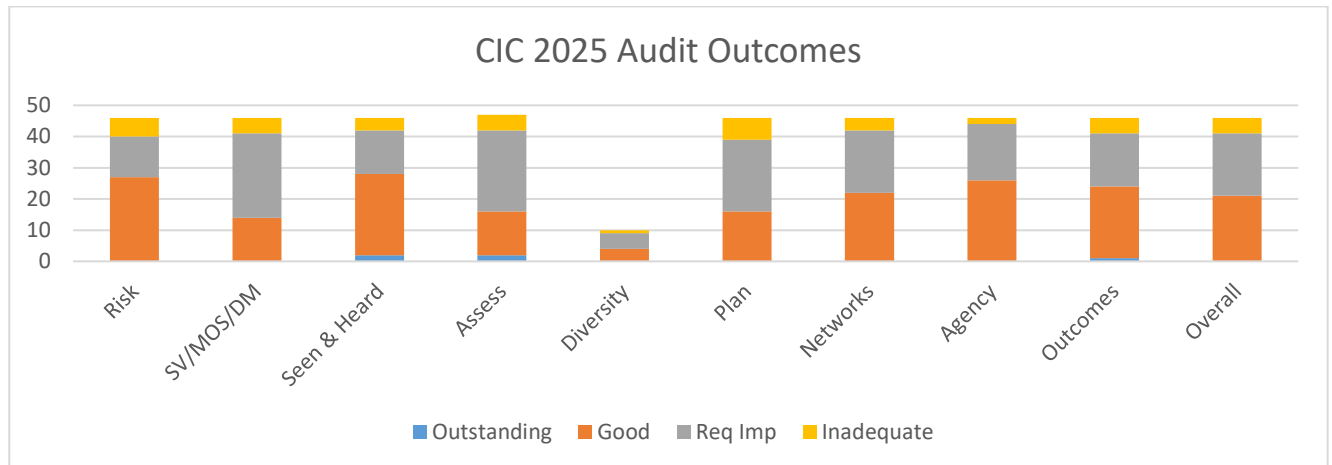
Audits have highlighted a need for –

- Greater awareness and training linked to Risk Outside the Home (ROTH) for both CIC and CL.
- Developing safety plans which are specific linking to mental wellbeing, ROTH, Domestic Abuse, Self harm, Serious Youth Violence and substance use

- Ensuring assessments reflect current level of need and any changes to their plan
- Developing guidance and practice linked to Placement with Parent Arrangements

These findings have been used to drive improvement work across both the children in care and care leaver teams.

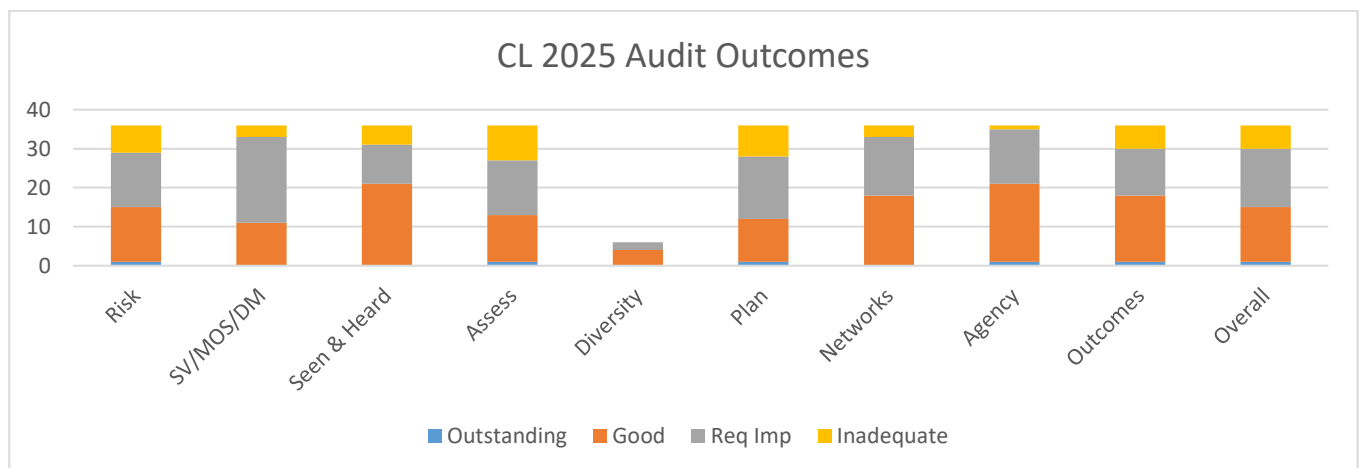
CIC audit activity over 2025 reviewed outcomes for **46 children**



Strengths – Response to Risk, Seeing & hearing children, Agency Collaboration, 52% of Outcomes judged as Good.

Areas for Development – Supervision, Assessment and Plans

Care Leaver audit activity over 2025 reviewed outcomes for **36 young people**.



Strengths - Seeing and hearing young people, Agency collaboration, Outcomes 50% judged as Good

Areas for development – Response to Risk, Assessment and Plans.

Focus of the Corporate Parenting Board in 2026-2027

The Corporate Parenting Board reflects a shared commitment: to treat every child in our care with the same dedication and ambition we would have for our own children. Being a Corporate Parent is a shared responsibility and a powerful commitment. Together, we will continue to raise aspirations, break down barriers, and build a future where every young person feels seen, supported, and inspired to thrive.

In the year ahead the corporate parenting board will continue to work to drive the work and activity across all the work streams, however there will be particular focus on the following three areas:

- Continuing to ensure the voice of our children and young people is central to everything the board does.

We will build on work undertaken over the last year, led by our participation service around how we enable young people to be actively involved in the work and scrutiny of the board. This work has begun already with members of the board regularly attending our TCC and EPIC groups, with the year ahead the opportunity to further build on this positive start.

- Continuing to embed Care Experienced as akin to a protected characteristic within the Local Authority and beyond

The board will support the activity already ongoing which is seeking to maintain the momentum of the local authority having recognised care experience as akin to a protected characteristic. Engaging and pushing partners to be as ambitious as possible will be key.

- A relentless focus on how we get as many of our care experienced young people into Education, employment and training as possible by seeking to address the root causes of what prevents young people gaining and maintaining the right opportunities for them

We know that being the best possible parent means sometimes we need to be a bit pushy and to make sure our young people are getting the opportunities they deserve. Over the coming year we will work alongside our partners to try and address the recurring barriers we see to young people being able to get and then keep the right educational or employment opportunities for them. In particular we will focus around getting our care experienced young adults the right pathways into mental health and drug and alcohol support.