



Review of Corporate Parenting Plans

2018 - 2021



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Introduction

Section 59 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 places the duty on corporate parents to prepare, keep under review and publish a Corporate Parenting Plan. It also places a duty on corporate parents to consult other corporate parents before preparing or revising a plan. In view of this duty, we present our review of the Corporate Parenting Plans prepared by Scotland's corporate parent organisations. Specifically, we assessed whether Plans contained the duties of corporate parents, an action plan of intended activities and outcomes, and details surrounding Plans' governance and review arrangements.

We reviewed 93 Corporate Parenting Plans across 85 different corporate parents; seven corporate parents submitting two or more Plans that covered the 2018-2021 period. We did not assess a small number of the Plans submitted because they predated the 2018-2021 timeframe.

Our findings point to a number of existing strengths but also areas for improvement that corporate parents can learn from when developing and drafting future Plans. We have highlighted these via a series of 'Learning Points' and 'Spotlights' that extract a selection of the good practice examples we identified.

As set out in the main report, a Children, Young People and Families Outcomes framework is currently being developed by the Scottish Government in collaboration with stakeholders. This will support consistency across different reporting requirements in Scotland, including on Children's Services Plans. It may be the case that this work could provide an opportunity for alignment with Corporate Parenting data collection, planning and analysis and this is something that can be considered in the next phase of planning.

Timeframes of Corporate Parenting Plans

Across the 93 Corporate Parenting Plans, we found that corporate parents had adopted different timeframes for their Plans with those varying from one to five year timeframes. Some did not have any timeframe clearly specified, which would appear to inhibit the Plans' delivery and monitoring.

Learning Point: Plans should be live and flexible documents to underpin corporate parenting activity and regular evaluation against those plans

Corporate parents should have Plans (and action plans) in place that are live and which provide clarity on the current and future planned activities designed to meet the needs and priorities of care experienced children and young people. Whether conceived as an ongoing cycle of annual, one-year plans, or as a multi-year plan that is regularly reviewed (and refreshed where appropriate), it is critical that Plans do not become out-of-date.

As live documents, Plans should also be responsive to emerging issues and developments – hence there is a case for reviewing, and potentially refreshing, Plans on a more frequent basis than the 'at least every three years' contained in the Statutory Guidance. At the national level, current examples of key developments include The Promise, the UNCRC, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to digital technology, and keeping brothers and sisters together.

Duties

A focus of our review was to consider whether corporate parenting duties within the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 – specifically Sections 58, 59 and 60 duties – were referred to within the Plans. We found that a large proportion of the Plans referred to each of the section 58 duties and demonstrated good awareness and understanding of the six duties (Alert, Assess, Promote, Opportunities, Access and Improve). The majority of the Plans also referred to the Section 59 duty to prepare, keep under review, and publish a Corporate Parenting Plan. However, few plans were 'live documents' and a number did not reference previous plans or provide an update on previous activity. Greater acknowledgment of, and reference to, previous activity and how this developed over time, alongside the learning taken from that would have provided stronger evidence that corporate parents were keeping their Plans and the actions contained within these under review. The majority of Plans provided evidence of collaboration in their development including those produced by local authorities (or community planning partnerships more widely) which referred to their local Integrated Children's Services Plan.

Learning Point: Plans should reflect organisations' 'journey' as corporate parents

Organisations' understanding and response to the duties and responsibilities placed on them by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 will evolve and develop over time. Some Plans reflected this 'journey' by providing updates on previous actions, openness of the progress and advances they have made as well as the challenges they have encountered, and gave a clear sense of direction of what the corporate parent is committed to achieving.

Learning Point: Plans should be developed in collaboration with other corporate parents

In line with the Section 60 duty to collaborate, some corporate parents made clear how they had consulted and worked with other corporate parents in the development of their Plans. However, there were also Plans where collaboration did not appear to extend beyond consultation and advice from Who Cares? Scotland and CELCIS. Whilst the seeking of external advice is regarded as one example of collaboration, it does not equate to different corporate parents coming together to understand each other's remit, responsibilities, resources and priorities. By working more actively together to develop their respective Plans, partners can collectively bring about a more holistic, joined-up support landscape for care experienced children and young people, thus attending to their needs more fully.

In order to give true effect to the Section 58 duties, it is imperative that corporate parents seek to understand the complexities and different needs of the looked after children and young people that they have responsibility for (e.g. different ages and stages of development; gender; placement types; disabilities; cultural and religious backgrounds; and geographical contexts). To review this, we considered any research, statistical, survey or other evidence referred to in the Plans that helped to demonstrate a robust and informed understanding of their care experienced children and young people population. We found that, whilst the majority of Plans did demonstrate some understanding, many Plans referred to 'high level' national data or research findings related to looked after children and young people, but did not provide evidence of undertaking their own detailed analysis of the population they have responsibility for (e.g. corporate parents could have presented the profile, needs and priorities of the care experienced children and young people they directly or indirectly serve, as opposed to relying solely on national analyses and findings).

Learning Point: Plans should demonstrate thorough and detailed understanding of their children and young people

A small number of Plans used and analysed their own management information systems data (e.g. student cohort data held by universities and colleges) to develop a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the profile, needs and outcomes of the care experienced children and young people they have responsibilities for. These plans were therefore able to demonstrate that they had moved beyond a reliance on widely available, national data and research and in doing so that they had given consideration to the specific characteristics and needs of the children and young people their system and service interact with and support.

Learning Point: Plans should attend to the different needs and characteristics of their children and young people

With age a key characteristic, the majority of Plans appeared to focus on the needs of 14-19 year olds, arguably because there are more established mechanisms for engaging with this age group (e.g. Champions Boards). However, responsibilities for most corporate parents extends to children from birth to care leavers up to the age of 26; and Plans should equally reflect these younger and older age groups. North Ayrshire's Corporate Parenting Plan provides a good example of this by having specific sections for 0-5 years, 5-18 years and 18-26 years.

In addition to age, some Plans paid attention to gender and different placement types (e.g. looked after at home, looked after away from home, kinship care, and secure care placements) but very few Plans considered children and young people's stages of development (as opposed to age only), disabilities, cultural and religious backgrounds, sexual orientation or gender identity.

We then considered whether it seemed that corporate parents had listened to and incorporated the views of care experienced children and young people; and whether the Plans were written and presented in a child-friendly manner so as to increase its use and accessibility by children and young people. We found that more could be done in terms of the participation of children and young people within the development of corporate parent plans. However, this needs to be carefully planned across corporate parents as there is the potential for the same children and young people to be engaged on numerous occasions, while the voices of other children and young people are not being heard. Furthermore, it is also important to consider what the participation expectations of national bodies with limited direct contact with care experienced children and young people ought to involve in developing plans, as it is important that participation is meaningful for children and young people and with a clear purpose.

Learning Point: Plans should capture and articulate children and young people's voice

Some Plans clearly demonstrated that children and young people were active participants in the development process. For example, there was explanation on how the views, needs and priorities of children and young people had been heard and incorporated into the Plans (e.g. via Champions Boards, focus groups, surveys and one-to-one discussions). This positive practice helped ensure that children and young people's views were central to the Plans and formed the basis to a number of the actions contained in the Plan's action plan. In contrast, there were Plans that showed limited evidence of participating with children and young people, or they presented children and young people's views as a standalone section with minimal integration into the substance of the Plan.

Learning Point: **Plans should be heartfelt**

A number of Plans used language that demonstrated warmth, authenticity and commitment to the care experienced children and young people they have responsibilities for. Examples of this include the use of 'promises' or 'commitments' to make clear to children and young people what the corporate parent is committed to delivering.

Spotlight: **Forestry and Land Scotland's use of authentic language**

Forestry and Land Scotland provide a good example of authentic language by entitling their plan 'Putting Down Roots'. This title was chosen following focus groups with care experienced young people where they expressed that care experienced children may not have roots (e.g. a place to call home or to go back to when they are older with their own children). The Plan therefore clearly speaks to children and young people's views and feels authentic as it aligns with Forestry and Land Scotland's purpose of looking after Scotland's forests and land.

Spotlight: **The Care Inspectorate making clear their commitment to care experienced young people**

The Care Inspectorate's Corporate Parenting Plan explicitly laid out a set of commitments that it will deliver to improve the lives and experiences of children and young people.

“We safeguard and promote the wellbeing of care experienced young people by:

- regulating and inspecting all care services which care experienced young people may make use of, to make sure they are of high quality and effective in delivering on national care and health standards, and supporting them to improve where needed;
- inspecting and reporting on how well staff from different services work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for care experienced young people, and helping them work better together where needed;
- investigating complaints made by young people about care services to make sure problems are addressed and, where needed, the quality of care improves;
- providing information which helps care experienced young people make decisions about their care and informs them about their rights and possible sources of support;
- gathering the views of care experienced young people about the quality and accessibility of care services and using this understanding to plan where, when and how to inspect;
- ensuring the voice of care experienced young people is reflected in the advice we give to service providers, Scottish Ministers, Scottish Government officials and other bodies;
- publishing information about issues affecting care experienced young people, highlighting barriers to good outcomes and identifying, sharing and promoting good practice;
- providing opportunities for care experienced young people to develop skills, experience and confidence to help them find employment and develop their careers; and
- working effectively with other corporate parents to promote the rights of care experienced young people, challenge negative and discriminatory stereotypes and celebrate their achievements.”

Learning Point: **Plans should be drafted in an appealing, child-friendly style**

A small number of corporate parents clearly drafted their Plans so that children and young people could easily understand them. They showed warmth and commitment to their children and young people; used colour, graphics, pictures and direct quotes; simple, 'plain English' language throughout; clear layout and structure; and were short and clear.

To balance the importance of brevity versus detail, some corporate parents appended additional documents to provide further content for adults; while some corporate parents had both a full Plan (e.g. for professionals) and a shorter 'child and young person's' version of the Plan. Edinburgh Napier University termed their child and young person's version as the Bitesize Plan – a five-page document that clearly set out what admissions, pastoral, financial, and accommodation support care experienced students could access. Edinburgh Napier University's full Plan, for comparison, extended to 25 pages.

Spotlight: **North Ayrshire drafting in a child-friendly style**

Examples of the narrative used throughout the Plan are:

"This Corporate Parenting Plan describes how we will work together to help you to have better and more fair lives and to reduce the inequalities you experience."

"We are your Corporate Parents and we're responsible for looking out for you in the same way as other parents do, helping you to grow up to be happy, healthy and to achieve what you want in life."

"We asked 35 of you if the promises in this Plan make sense to you and if there are other matters which we should focus on. We have included some of your comments under some of the promises in the document and, at the end of this Plan, we have given more detail about what you said to us."

"You have been clear that the promises we make to you must be kept and that we need to genuinely listen to you."

Action Plans

The majority of the Plans had action plans (or actions), mapped six Section 58 duties of Alert, Assess, Promote, Opportunities, Access and Improve. Indeed, many action plans were organised into sections that had each of the six duties as section headings. We also considered whether actions were Specific – Measurable – Achievable – Realistic – and Time-bound (i.e. SMART). Of the five SMART themes, the main identified area of improvement was around how corporate parents measured their different actions, with many action plans not providing any indicators or information on how actions would be measured or monitored. To support improvement in this area, Chapter 11 provides illustrative examples of some of the indicators included in the Plans.

Learning Point: **Plans should be ambitious**

A number of Plans conveyed their ambition to effect positive change by articulating a clear vision of their impact as a corporate parent and by setting actions that would either stretch them as an organisation or would make a real difference to the care experienced children and young people that they have responsibilities for. A number of corporate parents also used positive language within their Plans that helped to communicate a ‘can do’ sentiment. In contrast, there were Plans that largely documented the activities that were already in place, and so did not appear to demonstrate a commitment to continuous reflection and improvement and testing out new activities for the benefit of care experienced children and young people.

Learning Point: **Action Plans should have fully-articulated, SMART actions**

In line with the five SMART themes, a number of corporate parents did have actions plans that provided a high level of detail on the actions they are committed to, the rationale or evidence base for each action, designated individuals or organisations responsible for each action, clear timeframes for each action, and measures or indicators to confirm whether an action has been completed or progress has been made.

Learning Point: **Action Plans should be creative and inclusive**

Demonstrating their warmth and commitment to their children and young people, a number of corporate parents included actions that showed imagination, creativity and a sense that every part of their organisation had been considered in terms of what could be offered, changed, tailored or added to provide enhanced support for their care experienced children and young people.

Truly listening to the views of children and young people supports a more creative, reflective and tailored approach, particularly if engaging with the diverse needs of care experienced children and young people and giving careful consideration to groups who may otherwise be further marginalised based on disability, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. The importance of ensuring the participation of children and young people in the development of the Plans is consequently reinforced.

Spotlight: **Fife College's creative and thoughtful actions**

Examples of actions that demonstrate attention and creativity to offer a range of practical and emotional supports are provided by Fife College:

- Co-develop and produce with students a set of offerings from every department to fulfil the parenting role by offering support to care-experienced students in every aspect of their lives, including:
 - Healthy eating on a budget workshops for example Ready, Steady, Cook! Access to cookery books.
 - Health & fitness check-ups.
 - Budgeting workshops.
 - Haircuts and beauty treatments from the (college's) salons.
 - Celebratory meals in the (college's) training restaurants.
 - Birthday cards from the college.
 - Laptops on loan.
- Continue to find ways to hear the care experienced students' voice through monthly 'We Care' days, engagement with Advocacy and Participation Worker, annual Pizza Night, and use of student surveys and mobile applications.
- Liaise with external agencies and other corporate parents to access a range of resources for example:
 - Passport.
 - Provisional/driving licence.
 - Driving lessons.
 - Support with independent living.
 - Lifeskills.
 - Parenting courses.
 - Leisure activities.

We found that more recent Plans incorporated the findings of the Independent Care Review, and we would expect to see in the 2021-2024 planning and review period that all Corporate Parents have given full consideration to the findings of The Promise and what actions they as Corporate Parents will take to keep The Promise.

Governance and Review of Corporate Parenting Plans

The final part of our review was to assess whether the Plans made clear who (e.g. an individual or a group) held responsibility for the Plan as a whole, and where responsibility for reviewing the Plan sits. We found that on both measures, around three quarters of Plans could have provided fuller information about the governance and review arrangements. The remainder contained no information on these arrangements.

This finding connects to earlier findings around the limited number of 'live documents'. Without clear governance and review arrangements, the result can be one-off Plans that are not used beyond their initial development, launch and publication.

In Summary

We found that the Corporate Parenting Plans varied in their content and depth. Most referred to the Section 58 duties and included an action plan that provided some level of detail on what organisations will do for their care experienced children and young people. However, we also found a number of areas where Plans could be improved – particularly in demonstrating that the needs and views of care experienced children and young people are central to the development of Plans. By increasing children and young people's participation, not only can Plans be more accessible to their multiple audiences but also be more clearly focused on the difference that corporate parents are striving to make to the lives of the care experienced children and young people they have responsibilities for.