



Corporate Parenting Strategy

2023 – 2025

Interim Update Autumn 2024



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Introduction

Surrey County Council published its Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023-2025 in January 2024. This interim report provides an update on progress in delivery of the strategy and should be read in conjunction with the original strategy which can be found on our website on our Corporate Parenting web pages [Surrey County Council's Corporate Parenting Board and Strategy - Surrey County Council](#). Young people have developed an easy-to-read version of the Strategy which will be uploaded to our Corporate Parenting website too

In this update we have provided more recent data about the children and young people that we care for. This data, along with other information has been captured from all themed reports presented to Corporate Parenting Board in 2024 and with young people's voices from the Your Care – Have your Say survey. Under each of our themes we have captured progress updates since we published our Strategy, what we have done in respect of our priorities, what children and young people have told us and what we still need to do.

As you will see on the following page, the numbers of children who are looked after by Surrey Council has reduced from 1013 on 31 March 2023 to 959 on 30 November 2024. This is because fewer children started to be looked after, and more children left care than started being looked after. A much higher percentage of children than before returned home after being looked after. The numbers and proportion of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people that we care for has also reduced slightly.

The number of young adults we support because they are care-experienced is also lower than it was in March 2023. This is because some of those young people have got older and fewer aged 22-25 are asking for us to provide support after they reach aged 21.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) reached a high of **140 (Jan 2023)** but has since reduced to **119 in November 2024**



The Surrey Family—about the children and young people we care for² on 30 November 2024

959 children looked after

- 111 0 - 4 year olds
- 146 5 - 9 year olds
- 374 10-15 year olds
- 328 16 -17 year olds

770 young people supported as care leavers

- 2 16 -17 year olds
- 684 18 - 21 year olds
- 84 22 - 25 year olds

1349 children were looked after at any time during the 12 months to November 2024

- 343 became looked after
- 400 left care

570 males

391 females

119 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

65% live in foster care

29% live in residential care

52% live outside of Surrey

35% females

65% males

We are in touch with 98% of 18-21 year olds

11% live with their parents

6% live with former foster carers

61% are in employment education or training

41% live in semi-independent or supported environment

8% were adopted

35% returned home

6.5% left care for a Special Guardianship arrangement

50% turned 18 or left care for other reasons



How we put our Strategy into practice

The **Corporate Parenting Board** (CPB) meets six times a year with meetings looking at specific themes. The User Voice and Participation Team continue to ensure that the Board has the views of children and young people informing its work. A young person with lived experience now co-chairs our Corporate Parenting Board with our lead Elected Member for Children's Services.

Following each Corporate Parenting Board meeting our **Corporate Parenting Operational Group** (CPOG) meets to take forward issues and decisions arising from the Corporate Parenting Board that require the actions from services both in and outside the council. The Operational Group meetings follow on from the themes of the Board and look to develop and improve services and support for children and young people, and embed the operational delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Young People's Voices and Influence

Previously, the User Voice and Participation Team (UVP) created a number of surveys through the year to gather the views of care-experienced children and young people, linked to the five key themes of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Moving forward, UVP will run one annual survey, alternating between a commissioned survey such as CoramBAAF's Your Life Your Say (Bright Spots) and a UVP-led survey.

This year the User Voice & Participation team established the Participation Champions network to bring together professionals from various sectors in Surrey, including frontline social care teams, foster carers, residential homes, the Surrey Virtual School, NHS health colleagues, and the police. Its goal is to champion participation across services and support the Surrey Youth Voice engagement strategy.



Theme One: Safeguarding

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

Pledge One: We will do everything we can to protect you from harm, to keep you safe and help you feel happy and secure.

What has happened since we published our strategy:

User Voice and Participation launched the **Your Care – Have Your Say survey** which ran for 10 weeks between 29 July and 9 October 2024.

201 children and young people had their voice heard. The age range breakdown of those responses is as follows:

7-17yrs: **90** | 18-25yrs: **109** | Prefer not to say: **2**

Living In Surrey: **123** | Living Out of Surrey: **68** | Prefer not to say: **10**

70% **felt that they had someone they could talk to** in the event they, or someone they knew, were experiencing bullying, cyber-bullying or a form of discrimination

80% of respondents reported they **felt that safeguarding conversations are happening**

72% of young people **felt they knew what to do if they were feeling unsafe** and 75% **knew where they could find resources and support to help them** if they were feeling unsafe

91% of respondents to the 2024 UVP Safeguarding report specifically mentioned **being supported by the right people helps them to feel safe** – this includes, family, partners, friends, keyworkers, personal advisors and foster carers.

Safeguarding Training for staff and carers

- We have been providing a 2-day training course on Extra Familial Harm across the staff network including children's homes staff
- We continue to offer safeguarding training for foster carers including additional courses on online safety and also exploitation

Restructure of Adolescent service

In the Summer of 2024 we reorganised how we support children in their teenage years. This was to make sure we were providing the right staff and resources especially where children were facing harm from outside of their homes and to help us work more closely with Surrey Police and local communities. We also developed specialist teams to help children and their families who needed more support because they were going missing from home, or facing stresses that meant they were on the edge of coming into the care of the council.

Risk Management meetings with multi-agency services and Community Partners

We continue to improve how we work together with others to keep children and young people safe in the community. Risk and Vulnerability Management (RVM) brings together partners who work with children and in the community to share information about **all children who are at risk of extra-familial harm** (EFH) including sexual and criminal exploitation, serious violence, radicalisation and missing children.

For all Surrey children who live in other counties, RVM will retain oversight of the child and up to date assessment and plans must be shared with the key agencies in the authority in which the child resides.

Youth Justice Service audit

The Youth Justice service has undertaken a detailed look at a sample of children who are looked after and who are involved in crime. This has helped them understand what affects those children the most. They have identified some actions including improving planning and joint visits with children's social workers and the carers they are living with, working closely with other youth justice teams if children aren't living in Surrey, and flagging where children need health support.

"Help ensure communication between YP like me and police who are involved in our birth family situation is handled and maintained" – 23 years old

Young people tell us that the things that help them feel safe haven't changed:

- Having their own safe space
- Having a good support network
- Feeling physically safe
- Being safe in the community

Theme Two: Safe and Stable Homes

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

Pledge Two: We will make sure you have a good quality home and can be part of your local community

Pledge Three: We will help you stay in touch safely with people that are important to you

What has happened since we published our strategy:

Children's Homes:

Across our eleven registered children's homes, we are very proud of our stabilised and improved Ofsted ratings with **all but one of our homes** now being graded as **Good** and two as **Outstanding**, with the exception of Hornbeam which in December was graded as **Requires Improvement**.

Our **Capital Investment programme** has seen the successful delivery of three brand new children's homes in Epsom and in Walton-on-Thames, as well as a replacement new build for the Shaw Family Contact Centre in Woking.



We have made significant efforts to promote our children's residential home staff as a priority group under the Recruitment and Retention Transformation. This has enabled us to improve recruitment and reduce vacancy levels, including the positive outcome that **ten of eleven Surrey County Council owned and managed children's homes now have permanent Registered Managers in post.**

With the 3 new Childrens homes opened in 2024, this provides an **increase of 10 places in homes** for Surrey children

Increased in-house capacity – Since May 2024, the number of children residing in children's homes in Surrey has risen from 34 to 41 compared to May 2023, marking a 20.5% increase. Currently, 32.5% of children are now living in Surrey homes.

Improved reunification - We have supported 54 children between Oct 2022 and Nov 2024 to return back to live with their families. **49 children are still living with their families.**



Fostering

- We have joined with 19 other councils in the South-East to form a **regional recruitment hub** to encourage more people to become foster carers for their local council. This is as well as the recruitment activity that we already do.
- We have established a Fostering **Recruitment and Retention Board** that meet six times a year to agree how we will recruit new foster carers and support our existing foster carers.
- We have **worked with our foster carers to agree a Foster Carers' Charter**. This sets out what foster carers can expect from children's services to support them to meet children's needs and how we will respect them as valued members of the team around the child.
- We have expanded our **Mockingbird family hub model** in the fostering service, by launching more constellations. Each constellation is a group of foster carers who support each other and who get to know the children they care for. This means they can help each other out and the children can get to know each other and the other foster carers in the constellation, building better relationships and networks.

Care Leavers

By 30 November 2024 we had contracts for **319 supported accommodation places for young people** in Surrey which means we have been able to help 82% of children living in supported accommodation stay in Surrey or within 20 miles of their family home address.

The council has also **invested £5.1 million to open group living houses for 28 care leavers in Surrey**. So far, we have delivered 2 of these group living homes, with a third due to open in March 2025 and a further 3 to be completed by March 2026.

In November 2023, **6 Surrey care experienced young people pitched the National Housing Project** to senior leaders at Surrey County Council and **this project has now been initiated**

We have secured funding with partners and National programmes to deliver **additional group living for Care Leavers** to engage in the National House Project

Theme Three: Education, Employment & Training

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

Pledge Five: We will support you with school, college, training and work so that you can achieve your best and have good opportunities when you get older

What has happened since we published our strategy

From the **Your Care – Have Your Say** survey which ran for 10 weeks between 29 July and 9 October 2024.

201 children and young people had their voice heard. The age range breakdown of those responses is as follows:

7-17yrs: **90** | 18-25yrs: **109** | Prefer not to say: **2**

Living In Surrey: **123** | Living Out of Surrey: **68** | Prefer not to say: **10**

Insights – support, conversations, opportunities, information sharing & equal opportunities

Young people feel more supported in their education than in employment and training, indicating a potential gap in support as they prepare for independence.

As part of our strategy for hearing more from younger ages, User Voice have started working with the Virtual School to capture feedback that supports each Corporate Parenting Board theme.

During a recent workshop run by the UVP team, young people highlighted they would like their workers to ask more about their future prospects, goals, and ambitions and share more information about support. They would also like workers to provide clear information on accessing education, benefits, and other resources.

Preferred Communication: Young people prefer receiving information through apps, websites, and direct conversations with their carers and workers.

Equal Opportunities: there is a noticeable difference from young people's feedback in the perception of having equal opportunities, with those in Surrey feeling more positive about their opportunities compared to those who placed outside of Surrey.

Perception of Support and Opportunities: Those living outside of Surrey are more likely to feel uncertainty or a lack of support and awareness of opportunities relating to their education, employment and training.

Consistency in Responses: young people who are placed in Surrey generally provided more consistent positive responses across all questions in the Your Care – Have Your Say survey compared to those outside of Surrey.

The Voice of the Child – Personal Education Plans (Key Stage 1-4): Information collated and shared by the Surrey Virtual School

"I took part in the school drama production this term which was fun. I am going to join the next production because it was really fun."

I am really good at asking questions, listening and maths. I know how to count in 5s and 3s."

Being behind as missed so much learning.

We get to learn new things and help our brains to grow and prepare for next year.

Being misunderstood or thought of as being rude.

I am really enjoying maths – something has clicked, my teacher this year uses different methods.

"I might go and look after horses. I do love horses."

- **Provisional results for 2024 reflect that 20% of Surrey children looked after achieved the 'Basics' measure** (English and maths at grades 9-4) equalling national children looked after for 2023, 73% of all children looked after achieved at least 1 qualification (68% the previous year) and 71% of children looked after with an EHCP achieved at least 1 qualification (compared with 61% the previous year)

- Whilst results for the combined **English and maths measure (at both grades 4-9 and 5-9)** decreased nationally and regionally for children looked after, **for Surrey looked after children they increased.**
- Surrey's Quarter 4 2023/24 benchmarking data for **care leavers aged 19-21 years shows 59% engaged in Education, Employment or Training.** This is above the South-East region comparator of 56% and means we are the **third highest of 21 local authorities in the South East region.**
- **There are now three units of training available on Olive for social workers, foster carers and Independent Reviewing Officers,** including a half day focus on 'Education, how to make a difference.' Two of these have been made mandatory for social workers.
- **Surrey secured Department for Education funding in December 2023 to deliver mentoring to care leavers in partnership with Goal 17.** Activity commenced in January 2024 to identify care leavers who would be interested in this offer and to recruit mentors. Surrey has intentionally focussed on care leavers who have been out of education, training and employment for some time based on our experience about the role mentoring can play in affecting change.

Partnership working

- **Working in partnership with John Lewis on the Building Happier Futures Employment programme** has provided care experienced young people with interview skills and work experience in 6 Waitrose branches across Surrey.
- **In 2024, 5 care leavers have attended work experience opportunities and 4 have secured permanent employment** which will be commencing shortly. This has provided valuable experience to care leavers and the programme will be ongoing into 2025.
- **Career Matters is a social enterprise which has partnered with the NHS to provide a variety of opportunities** for care experienced young people locally and are currently working with 55 Surrey care leavers.

Theme Four: Health and Wellbeing

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

Pledge Four: We will support you to be as healthy as possible—this includes having a healthy body and mind.

What has happened since we published our strategy

The User Voice & Participation Team have continued to work with colleagues from health and emotional wellbeing services to make sure children and young people’s voices are heard:

- Attendance at meetings to share the voice of children and young people, including the Healthy Outcomes subgroup and the Whole Systems Approach to Food & Wellbeing
- Delivery of Healthy Outcomes for Care Experienced Children & Young People training to staff and carers including voice of the child.
- Supported the development of the My Voice Matters art exhibition in partnership with New Leaf and the STARS service. Members of the team attended a creative art day, and the pieces produced were included in the exhibition.
- Continued support of the rollout and development of NHS Universal Family Careers for care leavers – including consulting with children and young people on a new name for the project.
- Bi-monthly meetings with health partners to work on projects and workstreams together.

Wellbeing: Care experienced young people specifically said their top three activities were: **playing video games, listening to music** and **seeing friends.**

“I share New Leaf with my young people all the time, but the wait list is approximately 6 months, but we do use them a lot. They do check in with them before they are allocated during the waiting time. If they need other types of support, they will refer or contact GP’s.”
Feedback from foster carer about the New Leaf Service.”

Improved Statutory Dental checks September 2024, **89.5% of Surrey Looked After Children in care for over a year and 78.8% of those in care for less than a year received timely statutory dental checks.** (Compared to September 2023, where the figures were 88.4% and 70%, respectively and with general childhood population in Surrey which is 53%)

Life Stories - August 2024, a policy document was finalised to aid practitioners in life story work for children in long-term care and adoption.

Whole System Approach to Food and Wellbeing

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

- The project has held workshops with key stakeholders, foster carers, and young people. Workshops identified the impact of trauma and mood on food choices for young people and produced a systemwide action plan.
- The multiagency core group have been working with public health to produce a looked after children's and care leavers section for the Surrey Food Strategy. As part of the strategy a Surrey Food in care toolkit for carers, children, young people, and professionals will be produced.

Dental- Additional Hours Scheme and Statutory Dental Checks

The Designated Team have continued to work with Dental Commissioners to promote the additional Hours Scheme which provides priority access for Looked After Children to receive their statutory dental check and complete identified dental treatment. The Additional Hours Scheme has been extended regionally which benefits Surrey Children placed out of county within the southeast. The scheme is currently extended until March 2025.

New Leaf – Emotional wellbeing and Mental Health

- Introduced a new pathway, with the Clinical Psychology working alongside the Neuro-Diverse service to improve the offer for looked after children with neuro-diversity
- New Leaf has made progress with reporting of Goal Based Outcomes (GBOs) over the last 12 months, from 8% only being recorded in October 2023 to 43% in October 2024. The ambition is to achieve 90%.
- Of all children whose outcomes have been recorded, improvement in mental health was reported to be over 70%, which is above the national average.
- Art Exhibition 'My Voice Matters', fully co-produced with Children and Young People & carers who use New Leaf services seen as a huge success.
- Profile of the service raised through positive publicity given by BBC Radio Surrey.

Sexual Health

In November 2024 sexual health was included within the health annual report to highlight the public health support offered to care experienced young people.

Substance Misuse

In November 2024 substance misuse was included within the health annual report to highlight the public health support offered to care experienced young people.

Theme Five: Leisure, Skills & Preparation for Independence

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

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

Pledge Six: We will make sure you have the chance to do hobbies, follow your interests and have new experiences

Pledge Seven: We will help you to feel confident and able to deal with difficult times in your life and we will help you prepare you for becoming an adult

What has happened since we published our strategy

Pathway plan training has been rolled out and runs regularly across the year, for all practitioners working with young people who require a Pathway Plan.

Key workers, foster carers and other trusted adults in their support network play the most important role in preparing for independence

Young people want more support in some areas when preparing for independence, including **on-going support for their emotional wellbeing and mental health and targeted to their specific age and context**. They would also like to continue playing a role in shaping this support



Funding

Secured **£447k of DfE funding** in November 2023 to establish a new **mentoring programme for up to 60 care leavers in Surrey**

Secured **£4,800 of household support funding** in October 2024 enabling **Care Leavers with an Air fryer** as they embark on their independent living journey.

In November 2024 established access to **Springboard Funding scheme for Care Leavers** from January 2025 to provide **financial vouchers up to the value of £300 towards items such as annual gym memberships & laptops**

- In January 2024, the Care Leavers service received DfE funding and partnered with Goal 17 to start a mentoring programme. This programme offers emotional support, role models, and help with education, training, and employment. The first 25 care leavers were matched with mentors in March 2024, with 35 more to follow. Mentoring is offered at least one hour per month for nine months.
- Surrey County Council administers Central Government funding schemes, such as the Fuel Poverty program and Household Support Fund, it has ensured ringfenced funds are available for Care leavers to assist with living costs.



Care Leavers Covenant – 2024 progress

- The NHS Universal Family Pilot successfully helped 25 Care Leavers access employment, education, and training by March 2024. Currently, 55 Care Leavers are engaged with the Thrive Programme and receiving support from Career Matters.
- Ringways Highways Alliance has developed a social value (SV) offer to Surrey Care Leavers, two Surrey Care Leavers are currently on their Apprenticeship Programme.
- In January 2024, a pilot Gym Pass Scheme for Care Leavers was launched with Huddle Gyms, allowing young people in care aged 16+ to access over 1500 gyms/spas nationwide and bring a friend or carer. Despite promotion, uptake was low due to the lengthy process for obtaining day passes. The scheme ends in December 2024. **A new gym offer aimed for Out of County Care Leavers will be available through Springboard funding from January 2025.**
- The 2023-25 pledge promises & Corporate Parenting strategy have been reviewed and renewed. These are shared on the local offer.

Next Steps

The Corporate Parenting Board and the Corporate Parenting Operational Group will continue to make sure that we do what we have said we will do in the Strategy and this update. We have detailed plan which we look at regularly to make sure we are taking action. Things we need to start doing or do differently since we published the strategy:

Safeguarding

- Take action to respond to young people's feedback about a need for **friendships and a support network**
- Make sure young people feel they have **the right social worker or PA well matched with them**
- Improve **young people's relationships with the police**
- Continue to make sure **housing and accommodation is up to standards** and is safe for our young people

Safe & Stable Homes

- **Young people to form part of the steering group that oversees the National House Project rollout in Surrey**
- Continue to ensure more Surrey Foster carers are available and able to care for Surrey Children

Education, Employment & Training

- Ensure **regular and meaningful conversations about education, employment and training**, especially with those aged 13-17 and care leavers aged 18 to 25, using their preferred communication methods such as apps, websites and direct conversations
- Ensure there is **consistent support** and information for young people living outside of Surrey
- **Address the uncertainty and gaps in support for employment and training, particularly for older age groups preparing for independence**
- **Improve perceptions and promote the successes of Surrey's children and young people by sharing inspiring stories and positive examples to motivate care-experienced young people**

Health and Wellbeing

- **Enhance conversations** : support carers, workers, and trusted adults to have meaningful conversation with children and young people, especially with 18-25-year-olds.
- **Increase awareness of resources**: provide comprehensive, accessible guides on physical and mental health resources for all age groups and promote resources close to where young people live.
- **Improve access to mental health services**: enhance signposting for support services for children and young people, particularly in schools and youth clubs.
- **Build strong support networks for young people and enhance their relationships between young people and health professionals.**
- **Enhance mental health support in schools and colleges, ensuring continuity as young people transition to further education and independence.**

Leisure, Skills & Preparation for Independence

- **Redesign the Surrey How Do I? series, with a new approach User Voice team to work with Corporate Parenting services, health partners and young people**
- Campaign to highlight the important role for key workers and foster carers in preparing young people for independence and improve resources available to them
- Make online resources available for young people, especially video content
- Add skill building into planned UVP groups and other Corporate Parenting and partner events
- User Voice team to continue to capture feedback from young people, including **concrete examples** of what support and resources have been most helpful

