

Dorset's Corporate Parenting Strategy

2020 – 2023

Making Dorset
the best place
to grow-up



Dorset
Council

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Introduction

Corporate Parenting

What... Corporate Parenting is the term used to refer to our collective responsibility to ensure the best possible outcomes for the children in care, and the young people who have left our care.

Who... Corporate Parents include elected members, officers of the Council and all employees, with support from stakeholders and our partners. It is our responsibility to ensure that our children and young people are safe, happy, well cared for and are given the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Corporate Parents must be aspirational and provide a stable platform for young people not just to progress in life, but to be ambitious and to access new opportunities and experiences. We have a responsibility to support them to gain the skills and confidence to lead independent lives, while ensuring they know they can call on help and support when they need it.

Why... Children in care are among the most vulnerable children and young people in our county and experience some of the greatest challenges. They require additional support to overcome the adverse childhood experiences that will contribute to poor life outcomes. We must provide them with the best possible services, including access to safe housing, education and work opportunities and to health services that meet the individual needs of each child in care and care leaver.

Introduction

What does this strategy do?

This strategy will:

- Highlight the collective responsibility we all have in fulfilling our duty as Corporate Parents and embed it across the entire local authority.
- Outline the mission, vision and values that we will uphold and the current context.
- Set out our key priorities and actions we will take to achieve them.
- Identify measures that will tell us whether we have been successful.

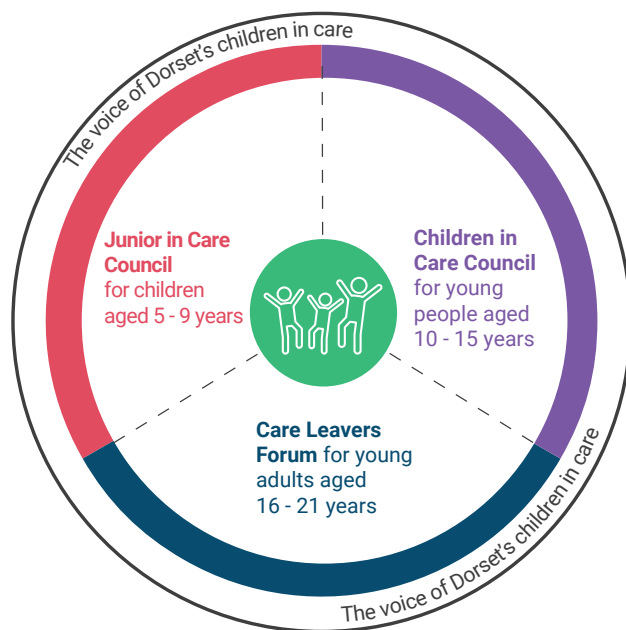
The Children and Social Work Act (2017) outlines the seven key Corporate Parenting Principles, which underpin our collective responsibilities and duty to children in care and care leavers:

- 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 Take their views, wishes and feelings into account.
- 4 Help them to gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- 5 Promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes for them.
- 6 Be safe, to have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- 7 Prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

The voice of Dorset's children in care

This strategy also reinforces the responsibility of our partners, namely health services, the police, educational and housing services, to assist Dorset Council in delivering services to children and young people to enable them to reach adulthood safely and to live independent and happy lives.

This strategy has been co-produced with children and young people to ensure they have a meaningful voice and we have developed ways to share thoughts, feelings, opinions and ideas and, where necessary, complaints (see figure X below).



Each forum is open to any child or young person that has experience of being in care. The Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Forum report back to children in care. They do this in a number of ways, including:

- Activity days in the school holidays
- Writing letters to them individually
- Attending Foster Care Forums.

- They also ask the Corporate Parenting Board to challenge young people on anything they want help with too!

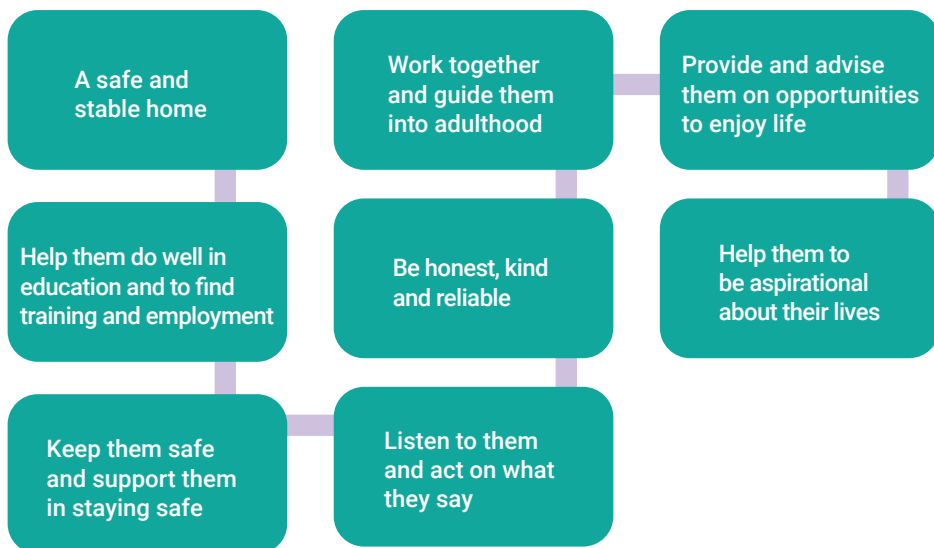
The Dorset Care Satisfaction Survey is an annual survey sent out to children in care and young people to give feedback on their experiences of care. It is presented at the Corporate Parenting Board and published on the Dorset Council website.

Dorset's Promise to Children in Care and to Care Leavers

In collaboration with children, young people and other professionals and stakeholders, we have developed a pledge to our children in care and to our care leavers. This sets out our priorities and commitment to them.

We asked them to tell us what was important to them.

They asked us to focus on eight things.



The promise is a commitment to children and young people by the Council so they know what help and support is available and what they can expect from their Corporate Parents. We will continue to talk to children and young people about the services we provide.

Overall, the aim of this strategy is to set out the key vision and priorities for the Corporate Parenting Board and to show how they will be worked towards to improve outcomes for

children in care and care leavers. We will work together with local authority partners, stakeholders and with our children in care and our care leavers to better understand: what is important to them, what is, or is not, working, where the gaps are in our service, what we do well and not so well, how we can improve what we do.

We want to work together to make Dorset a happy, healthy, safe and aspirational place to live.

Our Mission and Vision

Dorset Council is committed to working with children, young people and families to achieve the following:

Children in Dorset thrive, are happy and are the very best that they can be.

We listen and act so that the voices of children and families is at the heart of everything we do.

We work together to collaboratively shape, support and develop communities.

We inspire and enable children, young people and their families to find solutions that enable them to develop sustainable, safe and secure relationships with each other and within their community.

At Dorset Council, we want to get it right for children and families first time. We will do this by helping at an early stage, to meet need rather than manage threshold and to co-produce services with families. Their voices will co-design our services and drive their plans.

As a Corporate Parent, we will have high aspirations and be strong advocates for our children and young people. We want children in care and care leavers to be supported to develop the skills and resilience to prepare them for a successful adult life, and to deliver these services to the highest standard. We will develop, review and improve relationships and plans with our stakeholders and partners to achieve our priorities.

This strategy forms part of a wider range of activity that supports a shared aim to improve provision for children in care and care leavers for our:

- Corporate Parenting Board
- Junior Care Council, Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forums
- Promise to Children in Care and Care Leavers informed by the views of our children and young people and relevant stakeholders and partners.
- Virtual School working with educational providers to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.
- Set up of a Complex Fostering Team to support getting children back into stable placements in their local communities. Recruiting local carers for local children is a key target.
- Strategy for Children, Young People and Families 2017 – 2020 and the Council's overarching Corporate Strategy 2020 - 2024
- Corporate Parenting ensuring our responsibilities are embedded in all policies and strategies across the local authority.

Our Corporate Parenting Values

Our Values in Dorset Council are that we are:

Collaborative – Strength Based – Restorative

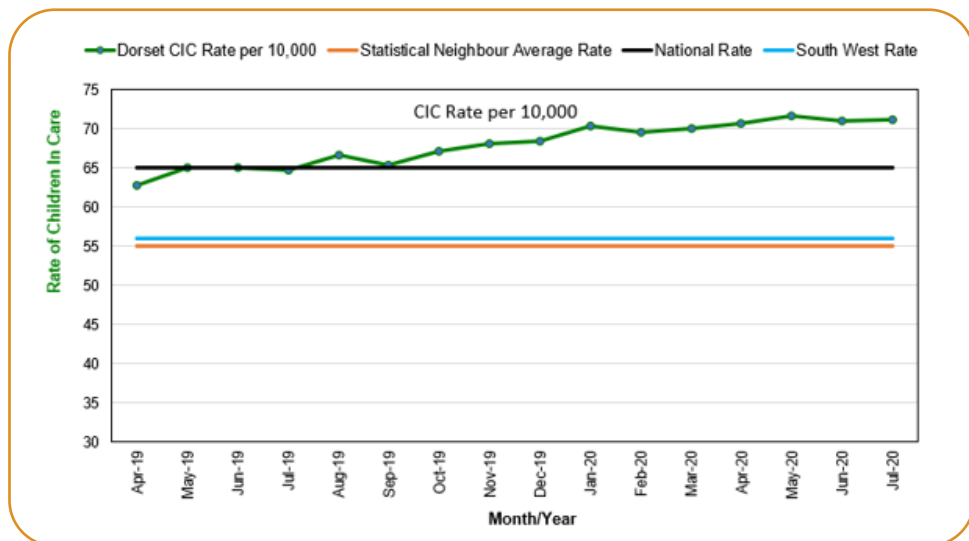
For children in care this means...

<p>They are the voice at the centre of development, policy and decision-making. They are listened to and their views acted upon and formally responded to.</p>	<p>The responsibility to achieve good outcomes lies across the whole council and with its partners. These services are rooted in the community, are good quality, efficient and easy to access.</p>
<p>If safe and possible, they will live with their family. If care is necessary, the options will be explored and the best quality placement will be found that offers stability and meets their needs.</p>	<p>Prevention and early intervention is a core aspect to give children in care the best opportunity to remain within their family unit.</p>
<p>They will access the best education provision possible and be supported in reaching their full potential.</p>	<p>They will be championed and supported as they leave care and live independently.</p>
<p>Have a knowledgeable and supportive social worker who is a constant and helps develop them and to access services in preparation for leaving care. There will be an independent person or advocate to talk to if needed.</p>	<p>The importance of peer support and forums to get together with other young children and people in care to discuss important things they have in common.</p>

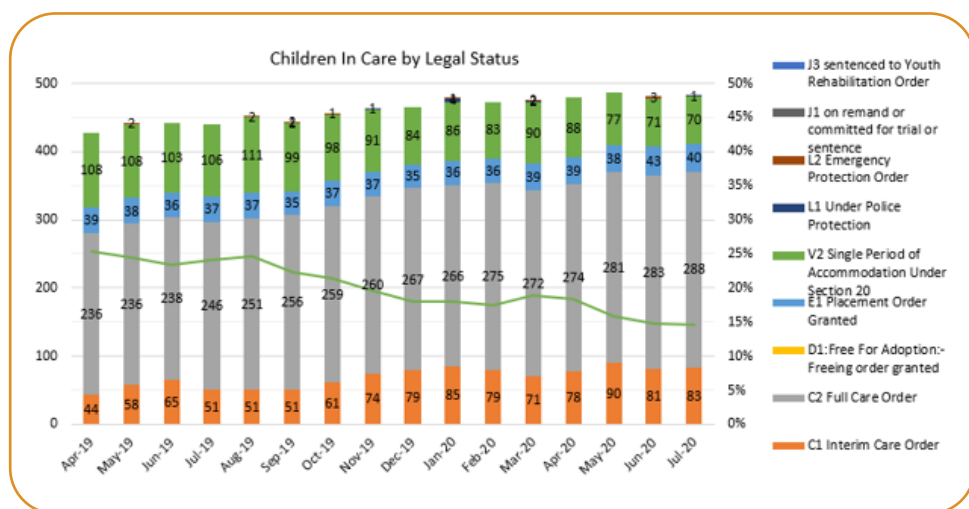
Their care and permanency plans will be regularly reviewed and reassessed so the child or young person is getting the right support at the right time.

The Context

Children in Care rate per 10,000



Children in Care by legal status



The Context

Financial Note

Given the pressure on public finances, commissioning services that drive this plan will be challenging. However, Dorset Council and their partners will remain ambitious for their children in care and their care leavers and are committed to robust and effective provision to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children. We have the core aim of equipping children and young people 'for life', and therefore, in the long term, reducing the ongoing costs of supporting care leavers in vulnerable adult populations. We aim to do this by a combination of developing additional provision within Dorset and by taking steps to manage the children social care market better through our sufficiency strategy.

In 2019, Dorset Council adopted a policy of committing to reduce the number of children in care, taking a rights-based approach, which develops services which support children to be able to grow up in a family setting. Dorset has a combined strategy to establish placement sufficiency:

- Change commissioning approach-Block contracting, or a similar vehicle, to identify providers who will guarantee access to a number of placements
- Hybrid provision- where Dorset Council owns or leases properties which providers use to run children's homes, or which are directly provided by Dorset Council.
- Use existing, or new, sources of capital investment, such as Social Impact Bond, to buy or build additional capacity in the residential estate for Dorset

Our Priorities

To be an effective Corporate Parent we have developed the following priorities/ambitions:

- 1 Increase opportunities to hear the voice of our children and young people and to take their views, wishes and feelings into account.
- 2 Promote better physical and mental health and well-being through improved access to health information and services.
- 3 Have high aspirations for children in care and care leavers in their education, training and employment.
- 4 Ensure safe and stable accommodation within the family home or close relatives and friends. If not possible, children are moved to a permanent placement without delay.
- 5 For our children to have a good and enriching experience of care provision and to prepare for adulthood and an independent and successful life.
- 6 Effective governance and planning arrangements are in place to mean the Corporate Parent can be the best they can be.

These priorities are closely tied in with the 'golden thread' running through the new Strategic Alliance Children, Young People and Families Strategy being developed this year.

The overarching priority of the whole service is to deliver services at the 'right time', and to do 'with', not 'to', or 'for'.

Early intervention is key to providing effective support to children and families. A whole system response with joined up provision can deliver good outcomes for all children and families to prevent the need for care.

Priority 1

Priority 1: Increase opportunities to hear the voice of our children and young people and to take their views, wishes and feelings into account when developing our services.

It is our duty to listen to, to consider and to respond to the views, wishes and feelings of our children and young people. Not just when working through their own individual experiences, but to help shape the delivery of our services. They can tell us how we are doing, what would make a difference to them and what issues are most important. We will:

- Use the new Dorset Promise to inform the design and delivery of our services. We will revisit, revise and reaffirm our commitment to the children and young people in our care.
- Continue to work with and build on the work of our forums: Junior in Care Council, Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Forum.
- Ensure that our children and young people have consistency in the support they receive by keeping the same social worker where possible, and that they are fully involved in their plans and reviews.
- Build in regular reviews and re-assessment of the child's life and outcomes as they progress through the care pathway to ensure their needs are being met at the right time.
- Every child in care over the age of eight will have an independent advocate to support their views being heard in decision-making forums.

Priority 2

Priority 2: Promote better physical and mental health and well-being through improved access to health information and services.

Physical and psychological ill-health tends to be higher in children in care and care leavers and they may have difficulty accessing the services they need. This can be due to not being able to access or to attend appointments, or not wanting to talk about feelings or medical worries. We will:

- Ensure that our children receive timely health assessments and individual action plans that are shared with those involved in their care, as appropriate, and that are regularly reviewed.
- Provide dedicated emotional health and CAMHS support in partnership with the CCG. We will be consistent in our use of the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire to understand the emotional and behavioural needs of our children.
- Improve access to training for foster carers and adopters to support the emotional wellbeing and development of our children in care (CAMHS/Child in Care nurses)
- Improve access to activities that promote good wellbeing, resilience, independence and confidence.
- Provide better access for our children to regular health checks via a GP and access to a dentist near to where they are living. There will be a planned transition from children to adult services for children in care and care leavers to enable access to continuing healthcare.

Priority 3

Priority 3: Have high aspirations for children in care and care leavers in their education, training and employment.

Good corporate parents set high aspirations and ambitions to that encourage individuality, confidence and personal development and growth. In order for children and young people to achieve good outcomes they must be given the opportunity to reach their full potential via stable, supportive and suitable education. Young people will be supported in accessing placements that encourage development of their abilities, skills and knowledge and onto further or higher education or apprenticeships and training programmes. We will:

- Create better access to good quality education at schools and colleges to prepare them for future education or training opportunities.
- Establish recruitment and employment practices that offer supported work experience, apprenticeships and jobs for those in, or have left, council care.
- The Dorset Virtual School will champion our children in care, and support, challenge and hold to account education and training settings to deliver the highest quality of opportunities. We will work towards all of our children in care having a confirmed offer.
- Create opportunities to attend a variety of social clubs, groups and cultural activities to meet new friends and to broaden their views, experiences and involvement in activities they enjoy.

Priority 4

Priority 4: When children are unable to live within their family we will ensure our children are matched to carers who promote local connections, provide safe and stable placements and achieve timely permanence.

When children enter our care, our focus will be on developing a clear and accessible pathway which is informed by the voice of the child or young person to ensure that their needs are met. All children need a permanent family arrangement wherever possible and to have it provided in a timely way. If a return to the family home is not possible, we aim to ensure access to a range of high-quality care placements within 20 miles of their home postcode.

We will also be pro-active in recruiting foster carers to increase provision to accommodate our children with specific needs. We have a drive to recruit more local carers to keep local children placed in the county. We will:

- Ensure that all placements are registered and monitored appropriately. We will try to keep our children in the county where possible.
- Enable Family Group Conferences for every child at risk of going into care to explore all options and to see if it is possible for them to stay with family or people known to them.
- Provide a Permanence Plan which assesses, plans and reviews the needs of every child in care and care leaver within four months and before the second Child in Care review.
- Conduct Quality Assurance via in depth audits each month. Service Managers and Head's of Service will conduct 'dip samples' on permanence cases; key themes will be pulled together on a quarterly basis to feedback for learning.
- Develop a 'complex' foster team to manage specific needs – disabilities, older children and siblings groups. We will focus on the needs of our foster carers to support them to provide a safe and stable home, to increase provision and to retain them.

Priority 5

Priority 5: For our children to have a good and enriching experience of care provision and to prepare for adulthood and an independent and successful life.

Our children and young people should be able to thrive across all areas of their lives whether home life, education, socially or work, and to build resilience through strong and trusted relationships going into adulthood. They should have opportunities to be part of the local community and to learn and grow.

Accommodation assistance to care leavers is a priority in Dorset; young people are competing with other vulnerable groups such as families with young children and in finding financially sustainable accommodation. We will:

- Ensure that children and young people are supported and have strong relationships with those involved in their care creating appropriate lifelong links. They must have all the necessary information and options explained and available to them.
- Maintain a Specialist Care Leaver service and personal advisors to support young people in moving towards independence, including accessing accommodation and health services as a priority.
- Develop the joint housing protocol for care leavers and ensure that there are robust and varied packages of accessible support for young people.
- Work with our partners to give them access to cultural, sport and leisure activities, building on our MAX card scheme.
- Champion our young people and celebrate their achievements together such as with the Children in Care Awards.
- Ensure that services are delivered locally and keep children close to home.

Priority 6

Priority 6: Effective governance and planning arrangements are in place to mean the Corporate Parent can be the best they can be.

All council departments, members and officers and partner agencies have a responsibility to act together to support the local authority to be effective Corporate Parents to all children in care and to care leavers. To do this, there needs to be a good structure in place so all are aware of their responsibilities and roles to ensure that the service development and delivery meets the needs of children in care and care leavers. We will:

- Ensure the appropriate governance arrangements are in place to implement any decisions made about our children in care and care leavers.
- That our plans link with strategic plans and joint plans with Childrens Services and partner agencies and reflect any statutory and regulatory changes.
- That we monitor and review our performance in-house, and also in line with our geographical, statistical neighbours and nationally. This approach will also help us to understand where gaps in our service exist.
- Audit the ability of all services to deliver the Corporate Parent agenda, and monitor and review their contribution to positive outcomes, especially those with disabilities and from minority groups.
- Ensure that the Corporate Parent role is embedded in employee awareness training, that employees sign up to a commitment to the role and to disseminate information and key messages. Corporate Parent officers and members will use their influence to support the accessing of services and outcomes will regularly be reported on.

How will we know?

The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) purpose is to ensure that the whole Council and partner agencies have a joint commitment to Corporate Parenting to achieve continuous improvement to services to enrich the lives and meet the specified aims and outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

Our progress against our priorities will be measured through a series of qualitative and quantitative measures, including data and performance analytics, reporting, feedback and challenge from the children and young people involved in the service. Examples of measures are provided below. Members and officers will report on progress against the strategy at the formal CPB meetings. The annual review of the strategy and its effectiveness will be evaluated and discussed within the CPB annual report.

Channels of feedback and communication

Opportunities to be made available for corporate parents to meet regularly with children in care and care leavers.

All children in care over the age of 8 yrs are offered an Advocate. All children to be made aware of the complaints procedure.

Corporate Parenting training to be promoted to all staff and members of the council.

Children in care and care leavers have the opportunity to coproduce services and consult on service delivery.



Children in care and care leavers participate in the to recruitment and appraisals of staff.

Children in care and careleavers are involved in audits and development of services.



Ultimately, we will measure our success on how we have made life better for the children and young people in our care – are they 'better off'?

Measures that will tell us how we are doing

This is not an exhaustive list but gives an example of the types of data that will be collected.

<p>Priority 1: Increase opportunities to hear the voice of our children and young people and to take their views, wishes and feelings into account when developing our services.</p>	<p>Feedback from the annual Satisfaction Survey: % children in care and care leavers who completed the survey stated that they were well supported by children’s services in working towards their aspirations and education goals</p> <p>% children in care and care leavers who completed survey stated they feel safe and well cared for</p> <p>% children who stated that their health support was good</p> <p>% children in care who participate in their reviews</p> <p>% care leavers stated they were involved in their Pathway Plans</p> <p>No. of children who attend the Children in Care Council – monthly</p> <p>No of care leavers who attend the Care Leavers Forum - monthly</p>
<p>Priority 2: Promote better physical and mental health and well-being through improved access to health information and services.</p>	<p>% initial health assessment</p> <p>% reviews of health assessment</p> <p>% dental check</p> <p>% of immunisations.</p> <p>% SDQ questionnaire completions (4- 16 years)</p> <p>Average SDQ scores</p>

Measures that will tell us how we are doing

Priority 3: Have high aspirations for children in care and care leavers in their education, training and employment.

% of children in care with an EHCP plan

% children in care achieving expected standards in Key Stage 2 Maths (termly)

% children in care achieving expected standards in Key Stage 2 Writing (termly)

% children in care achieving expected standards in Key Stage 2 Reading (termly)

Average Attainment 8 score (yearly)

Average progress 8 score (yearly)

% children with a Personal Education Plan

% children in care unauthorised absence

% Looked After Children who have been looked after for 12 months who have had at least one Fixed Term Exclusion

% all Looked After Children on reduced timetable

% Care Leavers who are in Employment Education or Training (19-21yrs)

Measures that will tell us how we are doing

Priority 4: When children are unable to live within their family we will ensure our children are matched to carers who promote local connections, provide safe and stable placements and achieve timely permanence.

% of children with a permanence plan.
% children who achieved permanence - SGO
% children who achieved permanence - Adoption
% children in care living more than 20 miles from home address
% children in care with 3 or more placement
% children in care 2.5 yrs in same placement for 2+ yrs
No of foster carers with delegated powers of responsibility
Number of allegations made against foster carers
Number of allegations made against foster carers that were substantiated
% of children who have had an episode of missing
% of children in care with more than one missing episode
% children in care living in a commissioned placement
% children in care living in foster placement

Priority 5: Good and enriching experience of care provision and to prepare for adulthood and an independent and successful life.

% care leavers who have a current Pathway Plan
% of care leavers living in suitable accommodation (19-21 years)
% of care leavers no longer in touch with Dorset local authority (19 – 21 years)

Measures that will tell us how we are doing

Priority 6:
Effective governance and planning arrangements are in place to support corporate parents can be the best they can be.

- No. of formal and informal Corporate Parenting Boards and attendance per annum.
- Participation of board members at activity days and participation events.
- Engagement with takeover events and audit.
- Benchmarking Corporate Parenting Data Set against previous year, Good and Outstanding Statistical Neighbours and National