

A Trusted Governance Improvement Organisation

Shaping Governance: A-Z of Governance

Breaking down key governance concepts into clear, digestible insights

C is for Corporate Parenting: The role of Councils and Schools

Su Turner, our CEO, shares her thinking…

When a child enters the care system, local councils and schools, both of which have a duty as Corporate Parents, share responsibility for their well-being and success. This means these institutions must ensure that looked-after children receive the same care, support, and opportunities as any other child.

*Corporate Parenting is more than a legal obligation; it's about having **high aspirations** for children in care, ensuring they are safe, supported, and given the best possible future. This duty was first introduced in the **Children Act 1989** and strengthened by the **Children and Social Work Act 2017**, which defines the responsibilities of councils and their **relevant partners**, including schools.*

The Role of Councillors as Corporate Parents

*Local councils have a **legal and moral duty** to act in the best interests of children in care. As Corporate Parents, councillors must ensure that **every decision they make considers the needs of looked-after children and care leavers**.*

*A **Corporate Parenting Board** is key to delivering on this duty. It brings together councillors, council officers, and other partners to oversee how well children in care are supported across services such as education, housing, and health. However, strong leadership is needed to make this responsibility **more than just a policy**—it must translate into **real outcomes** for children and young people.*

Tips for Councillors to Be Better Corporate Parents:

- ***Listen to young people** – Ensure the voices of children in care and care leavers are heard in decision-making.*
- ***Challenge performance**—Scrutinise reports, data, and strategies to ensure that children are receiving the support they need.*

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- ***Promote stability****—Work across housing, social care, and education to reduce the number of placements and school moves.*
- ***Champion high aspirations*** *– Encourage initiatives that support education, employment, and independent living skills.*
- ***Collaborate with partners inc schools*** *– Ensure strong partnership between councils and education providers.*

The Role of Schools and Governors in Corporate Parenting

Schools play a ***critical role*** *in supporting looked-after children in their education and overall well-being.* ***All schools—whether maintained or academies—are legally considered Corporate Parents****. This responsibility extends to* ***teachers, pastoral staff, and governors****.*

Children in care often face ***greater challenges*** *than their peers, including frequent school moves, disrupted learning, and social or emotional difficulties. As a result, they are at a higher risk of falling behind academically. The* ***role of school governors*** *is essential in ensuring these children receive the* ***support, stability, and high aspirations*** *they need to succeed.*

Tips for Governors to Be Better Corporate Parents:

- ***Know the data*** *– Understand how looked-after children are performing in your school and what support is in place.*
- ***Ask the right questions*** *– Challenge school leaders on their strategies to close the attainment gap for looked-after children.*
- ***Ensure staff training*** *– Make sure teachers and pastoral staff understand the needs of looked-after children.*
- ***Monitor progress and well-being*** *– Look beyond academic performance to attendance, exclusions, and mental health support.*
- ***Encourage enrichment opportunities*** *– Support access to extracurricular activities, mentoring, and work experience.*

Why This Matters

As of ***March 2023****, there were* ***83,840 children in care*** *in England. The reasons for entering care vary:*

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- ***57%** are male, **42%** are female*
- ***65%** have experienced significant **abuse or neglect***
- ***20%** have experienced **acute family distress** (illness, death, or family dysfunction)*
- ***5%** have a **disability***
- ***9%** have **absent parents or were relinquished at birth***
- ***Only 1%** are in care because of their **own behaviour***

*While councils and schools cannot change these circumstances, they **can** change the **outcomes** for these children. Evidence shows that looked-after children are more likely to experience **lower educational attainment, higher exclusion rates, and mental health challenges**. Strong, proactive Corporate Parenting can help **narrow the gap** and improve life chances.*

How We Support Councils and Schools

To help Corporate Parents fulfil their responsibilities effectively, we provide:

- ***Leadership sessions** for councillors and corporate parenting boards ensure they understand their legal responsibilities and have the tools to improve services. Our **Every Space, Every Opportunity programme** ensures children are at the heart of every decision, conversation, and space you're in.*
- ***Training and guidance** for school governors to help them support looked-after children, monitor progress, and challenge performance where necessary.*
- ***Resources and best practices** to ensure schools and councils work together in **raising aspirations and improving outcomes**.*

*By strengthening **council leadership** and **school governance**, we help ensure that **Corporate Parenting is not just a responsibility, but a commitment to real change.***

Contact us: Get in touch if you want to find out more: office@shapinggovernance.co.uk

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