

**Kent County Council**  
**Corporate Parenting Select Committee**

## **Children's experience of having a corporate parent**

When the Children's Rights Director in 2011 consulted children in care about their experience of having a corporate parent, their views reinforced the findings from other studies: that looked after children wanted to be seen as individuals and valued in their own right rather than being looked after in an impersonal way. They wanted to be cared about, not just cared for, but pointed out that corporate parents were not always successful at this.

### **Having care plans, meetings and case files**

Children identified a number of ways in which being cared for by a corporate parent made them 'different'. One key difference was the structured approach to their care. Looked after children were very aware that having a 'care plan', review meetings and formal medical checks were not things that happened within normal family life. Although they could understand the reasons for this difference, it made life difficult and uncomfortable for them at times. They had to deal with a large number of adults having a say in their life.

### **Financial factors**

The amount of money directly available to looked after children, or for their carers to spend on them, were seen as marking them out as different. Some thought they had more money, others less, and they perceived discrepancies between local authorities or placements in their approach to finances. Cost was seen as the biggest factor in decisions made by their local authority about what should happen to them and where they should be placed.

### **Bureaucratic processes for 'permission'**

Children in care found it frustrating to have to request permission from their corporate parent to do everyday things, such as go on a school trip or stay with friends. Residential or foster carers did not usually seem to have delegated authority to authorise these things and it could be a long process to receive local authority permission. To quote one looked after child,

*'You can't just go over to your friend's house ... it takes three to six months for police checks. Other people just go.'*

## **Being treated differently at school**

Children described being treated differently not only by education staff but also by other children. At times this was out of curiosity – being seen as different – or it was displayed by people being ‘too nice’. Receiving extra resources or attention made children in care stand out and they were not always comfortable with this. It was particularly difficult if expectations about the transition to independent living did not correspond to their educational status; trying to pursue education while living alone, without the support of residential or foster carers, was reported to be a big challenge.

## **Leaving care early to live on your own**

In spite of the additional support and protectiveness described above, children in care were still expected to make the transition to independent living sooner than their peers. In the words of one looked after child:

*‘You’re made to move out to get a flat at 16, and at that age you think “great”, but you’re not ready.’*

This was reported to be a source of anxiety for some children, although others were positive about the fact that they were entitled to receive help with accommodation when they left care.

## **Moving from place to place**

The importance of placement stability was well recognised, and looked after children confirmed how stressful it could be to move from place to place:

*‘There is no good thing about moving. It affected me. I couldn’t think straight. We’re like objects.’*

For some, moves had been positive and they recognised that staying in an inadequate placement was not the solution. The way that moves took place could be better, and children described receiving little warning of a move, or they stressed the need for more information – or choice – about where they were going.

## **Multiple professionals and disrupted relationships**

Children described a range of different professionals involved in their lives, including not only social workers and carers but also Independent Reviewing Officers, advocates and independent visitors. Their views on these differed according to their own experiences but most thought they could be a useful source of support – as long as there were not too many of them.

## **Having a Children in Care Council and a Care Pledge**

Although not all children in care were aware of a Children in Care Council and a Care Pledge, they are generally seen as positive and empowering. As one child explained:

*'We have participation meetings and we can ask, "Why aren't we getting this?" When you point out things that are wrong, you can get things changed. It's good.'*

Three-quarters of the children contacted thought that the Children in Care Council had made a difference – more so than the local Care Pledge.

Source: National Children's Bureau