
CHAMPIONS BOARD ANNUAL REPORT

Report by Director Social Work & Practice (CSWO)

Scottish Borders Council

28 September 2023

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report gives members sight of the Scottish Borders Champions Board School Pilot Review which was published in August 2023.
- 1.2 This report outlines details of the Champions Board Hub pilot projects that were developed at Jedburgh Grammar Campus and Berwickshire High School in the Spring and Summer terms.
- 1.3 The report evaluates the work undertaken in schools, incorporating feedback from the young people involved in the pilot and school staff supporting the project. Next steps for the Scottish Borders Champions Board approach are detailed in this cover paper.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Council:-

Endorse the publication of the Scottish Borders Champions Board School Pilot review and the next steps outlined in the cover paper.

3 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT FOR THE APPROACH

- 3.1 The United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) is a widely ratified international human rights treaty which was drafted in 1989 and provides forty two substantive rights to all children and young people under the age of 18. (Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989) The UNCRC was ratified by the United Kingdom in 1991.
- 3.2 Article 12 of the UNCRC invokes the right for children and young people to have their views considered when decisions are being made about any issues that involve them.
- 3.3 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 placed the UNCRC into a Scottish statute for the first time. It encourages Scottish Ministers and public bodies to consider children's rights and requires them to prepare reports on what they are doing to progress children's rights.
- 3.4 The Scottish Government has furthered plans to incorporate the UNCRC into Scottish Law, with the introduction of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill (Scottish Parliament, 2020). This is an important Bill, which - when finally passed - will make all the rights contained within the UNCRC a legally binding requirement in relation to devolved matters.
- 3.5 In 2020 The Promise was published, which fully reinforces incorporation of the UNCRC and article 12 in Scotland. It emphasises the importance of listening to children and young people in both decision-making about their individual lives, and also at a more strategic level within organisations. The Promise is very clear that the voices of children, young people and their families should be at the heart of decision making in Scotland.
- 3.6 Scottish Borders Council is a 'Corporate Parent' under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. This places a number of important duties on all employees - including Elected Members - to uphold the rights and safeguard the wellbeing of looked after children, young people and care leaversⁱ.
- 3.7 Part 9 of the 2014 Act places explicit statutory duties and responsibilities on corporate parents (Section 58). These include:
 - To be alert to matters which, or which might, adversely affect the wellbeing of looked after children and young people (and those in Continuing Care and Aftercare)
 - To assess the needs of those looked after children and young people for services and support it provides.
 - To promote the interests of looked after children and young people.
 - To seek to provide looked after children and young people with opportunities to participate in activities designed to promote their wellbeing.
 - To work collaboratively with other corporate parents when exercising their corporate parenting responsibilities, where they consider that doing so would safeguard or promote the wellbeing of looked after children and young people.

- 3.8 The development of Champions Boards in Scotland is an approach to participation with care experienced children and young people which has been evolving since 2016. The aim of the approach is to enable children and young people with care experience to have both an individual and collective voice and influence in relation to the services they receive.
- 3.9 Champions Boards across Scotland have different ways of engaging with care experienced children and young people. These include a range of drop-in groups, social activities and events, 1-2-1 meet ups and regular group meetings in a range of different settings, areas or for different ages. In some places young people have their own physical space to call their own through their Board.
- 3.10 21 Champions Boards received funding from the Life Changes Trust between 2016 and 2022. The Life Changes Trust also funded a national Champions Board network which continues to run and includes the 21 Champions Boards that the Trust funded, as well as eight local authority areas (including Scottish Borders) who have not had a Trust-funded Champions Board but have Champions Board related activity.
- 3.11 Champions Boards have been flexibly created and developed, taking into account the local context and needs of their young care experienced population. The Champions Board approach has been commended by Scottish Government and national children's rights organisations as a successful approach to creating forums which allow care experienced children and young people *'to have direct, meaningful involvement in all areas of decision making.'*
- 3.12 Care experienced children and young people involved with Champions Boards have shared that they have felt listened to and respected and that they have been able to shape and influence decision making locally.

4 LOCAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In 2020 the Corporate Parenting Operations Group tasked two social work practitioners with researching the Champions Board Approach to ascertain whether it could be adapted and developed for participation work with care experienced children and young people in Scottish Borders. The practitioners reviewed national Champions Board evaluation reports and spoke to the national Champions Board network coordinator and colleagues in other authorities who were embedding the approach.
- 4.2 A paper was presented to the Corporate Parenting Operations Group in November 2020, recommending the implementation of the approach in Scottish Borders. The group supported the recommendations and in Spring/Summer 2021 recruitment was undertaken for a newly created 'Modern Apprentice Lead Young Person Champions Board' post. Funding was also sought via the Corra Foundation to create a Promise Implementation Officer post.
- 4.3 Cory Paterson and Hannah Hawthorn were appointed respectively to the roles of MA Lead Young Person and The Promise Implementation Officer at Scottish Borders Council and started working together in September 2021

to develop the approach in Scottish Borders. Both are now in different positions- Cory as Promise Project Worker and Hannah as Promise Lead Officer within the Promise Team. They are supported by a small team of dedicated colleagues from the Family Placement Team, Wheatlands Children's House, and the Community Learning and Development team.

5 CHAMPIONS BOARD DEVELOPMENT WORK TO DATE AND SCHOOL PILOT

- 5.1 The Champions Board annual report was brought to Council on 31st March 2023 and outlined the work that had been undertaken until the end of 2022.
- 5.2 The purpose of the Schools Pilot Project was to set up Champions Board Hubs in two education facilities within the Scottish Borders. With accessibility being one of the underlying principles of the Scottish Borders Champions Board, being able to reach out to young people in different parts of the Borders has been key. Setting up these Hubs in schools enabled Cory and Hannah to get to know young people in their own communities, rather than the young people having to travel to a central location.
- 5.3 Two pilot schools were identified after taking different data into account, such as: the number of care experienced pupils, any pre-existing provision for care experienced pupils, and interest expressed by the school in the past about a Champions Board approach. Following discussion with the Virtual School Headteacher, **Jedburgh Grammar Campus** and **Berwickshire High School** were approached.
- 5.4 By creating these new Hubs in schools, the Promise Team has managed to almost triple the number of young people it is reaching. The more young people the Promise Team works with, the more voices we will hear, and the better understanding we can have of what is working well for care experienced young people and what needs to change.

6 NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 The Champions Board Hubs will continue to be developed at Jedburgh Grammar Campus and Berwickshire High School. 1-2-1 work will also continue to be offered where it is needed and where The Promise Team have capacity to do so.
- 6.2 Initial meetings are planned with Hawick High School and Peebles High School, with the aim of developing Champions Board Hubs in two more schools before the end of 2023.
- 6.3 A Borders College and Heriot Watt Champions Board Hub will be developed over the 2023-24 academic year. This will help to ensure that care experienced young people who are continuing their academic journey into further education locally have the ongoing support of the Champions Board network.

6.4 The development of the New Roots Group for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people is also a priority for 2023/24. The aims of this project are to:

- provide a platform for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers living in the Scottish Borders to have a voice and influence change,
- support the creation of new links within the community,
- learn and share information about other cultures (including both the young people's cultures and Scottish culture),
- and to offer a safe space for peer support and a welcome to new arrivals in the Scottish Borders.

7 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

There are no costs attached to the publication of this report.

7.2 Risk and Mitigations

This report highlights the importance of continuing to develop the Champions Board Approach in Scottish Borders as an important mechanism for ensuring the implementation of article 12 of the UNCRC and keeping the Promise.

7.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

This report concerns updates about the Scottish Borders Champions Board and endorsement of the Pilot Review does not require an Integrated Impact Assessment at this time.

7.4 Sustainable Development Goals

UN SD Goal	Impact
End poverty in all its forms	N/A
End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture	N/A
Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages	Promoting health and wellbeing (including good mental health) is recognised as an important factor in the Champions Board Approach. Indeed reducing social isolation has been one of the specific benefits of the Champions Board Approach which has been highlighted by young people involved with the project to date.
Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	Work continues with Education Services to identify and tackle barriers to school attendance brought about through poverty. Our Community Learning and Development Plans provide technical and vocational training programmes, and our Partners also provide various opportunities

	through local economic development strategies. These actions all help to support vulnerable and marginalized individuals and communities to ensure access to education and training to meet their needs.
Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all	N/A
Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all	Listening and responding to care experienced children and young people's views on productive employment and work for all via the Champions Board approach may support with developing this goal.
Reduce inequalities within and among countries	It is well recognised that care experienced children and young people's voices are often unheard within service design, development, evaluation and monitoring. The Champions Board approach ensures that what matters to care experienced children and young people is heard and placed at the heart of decision making in Scottish Borders.
Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe resilient and sustainable	Listening and responding to care experienced children and young people's views on their communities via the Champions Board approach may support with developing this goal.

7.5 **Climate Change**

There is no impact on climate change as a result of endorsing the publication of this report.

7.6 **Rural Proofing**

There are no rural proofing implications contained in this report.

7.7 **Data Protection Impact Statement**

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

7.8 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

There are no changes required to either the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of publishing the Champions Board report.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Director (Finance & Corporate Governance), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate

Communications have been consulted and any comments received will need to be incorporated into the final report.

Approved by


Stuart C. Easingwood

Director – Social Work & Practice

Author(s)

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Background Papers:

- Independent Care Review (2020a) *The Promise*. Glasgow: Independent Care Review. Available from: <https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Promise.pdf> [3rd March 2023]
- Life Changes Trust and Research Scotland (2022) *Evaluation of the Champions Board Approach Full Report* [online]. Available from: <https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/publication/files/Evaluation%20of%20the%20Champions%20Board%20Approach%20Full%20Report%20.pdf> [1st March 2023]
- Scottish Borders Council (2022) *Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021-22* [online]. Available from: https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/downloads/download/786/welcome_to_the_scottish_borders_guide
- Scottish Borders Council (2023) *Champions Board Annual Report 2022/23*

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- Scottish Government (2021) *Caring for our Children and Young People: An update on Scotland's Corporate Parenting 2018 – 2021*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/progress-report/2021/12/caring-children-young-people-update-scotlands-corporate-parenting-2018-21/documents/caring-children-young-people-update-scotlands-corporate-parenting-2018-2021/caring-children-young-people-update-scotlands-corporate-parenting-2018-2021/govscot%3Adocument/caring-children-young-people-update-scotlands-corporate-parenting-2018-2021.pdf>

Previous Minute Reference: [insert last Minute reference (if any)]

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ⁱ ‘looked after child’ (often shortened to the acronym LAC) and ‘care leaver’ are terminology used in legislation. The Promise and Who Cares? Scotland have reported that many children and young people with care experience can find these terms stigmatising and compounding a sense of being different. As recommended in The Promise, we currently widely use ‘care experienced children and young people’ and ‘children and young people with care experience’ interchangeably as identity definitions, and to signify access to specific rights and entitlements.