

Motion in the name of Councillor Georgia Power

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care headed by Josh McCallister, published in May 2022 a final report and recommendations that included:

“Government should make care experience a protected characteristic”

and

“New legislation should be passed which broadens corporate parenting responsibilities across a wider set of public bodies and organisations.”

On Protected Characteristics for Care Experience:

“Many care experienced people face discrimination, stigma and prejudice in their day to day lives. Public perceptions of care experience centre on the idea that children are irredeemably damaged and that can lead to discrimination and assumptions being made.”

One young person told the review that a teacher had told them “You're smart - for a kid in care” and another young person said “I don't want people to point out that I am in care if I don't want that mentioned. It makes me so cross – that shouldn't happen.”

This stigma and discrimination can be explicit and often comes with assumptions about the likely characteristics of children and adults that have care experience. They can also be implicit and are evidenced in the way care experience is discussed in schools, workplaces and the media.

At its worst this can lead to care experienced people being refused employment, failing to succeed in education or facing unfair judgements about their ability to parent when they have children and families of their own.

Hearing testimony from care experienced people sharing the discrimination they have experienced, even from a very young age, it is clear that such discrimination can be similar in nature to other groups that have a legally protected characteristic under the Equality Act (2010).

So, while there may be ways that society can help reduce stigma and discrimination, including creating greater public consciousness on these issues, just as with other areas of equality, there is a case to go further. Therefore, the government should make care experience a protected characteristic.

“Making care experience a protected characteristic would provide greater authority to employers, businesses, public services, and policy makers to put in place policies and programmes which promote better outcomes for care experienced people. It will make the UK the first country in the world to recognise care experienced people in this way. As a measure, it will bolster and pave the way for a number of the recommendations in this chapter.”

Independent Review of Children's Social Care May 2022

Nottingham City Council believes that care experienced people face significant barriers that impact them throughout their lives:

- Despite the resilience of many care experienced people, society too often does not take their needs into account
- Care experienced people often face discrimination and stigma across housing, health, education, relationships, employment and in the criminal justice system
- Care experienced people often face a postcode lottery of support
- As corporate parents, councillors have a collective responsibility for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by us as an authority
- All corporate parents should commit to acting as mentors, hearing the voices of looked after children and young people and to consider their needs in any aspect of council work
- Councillors should be champions of our looked after children and challenge the negative attitudes and prejudice that exists in all aspects of society
- The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies, such as councils, to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation of people with protected characteristics
- Nottingham City Council acknowledges that children entering the care system are often split from their siblings and placed outside their home local authority area, that they don't choose to enter the care system, that they don't choose to be split up from their siblings and don't choose to be placed outside their local area.

Nottingham City Council therefore resolves:

1. that when making any decisions in relation to its policies or formulating its Council Plan it recognises that care experienced people are a vulnerable group who face discrimination;
2. that it recognises that councils have a duty to put the needs of vulnerable people at the heart of decision-making through co-production and collaboration;
3. that in the delivery of the Public Sector Equality Duty the Council includes care experience in the publication and review of Equality Objectives and the annual publication of information relating to people who share a Protected Characteristic in services and employment;
4. that this Council will treat care experience as if it were a Protected Characteristic so that future services and policies made and adopted by the Council should be assessed through Equality Impact Assessments to determine the impact of changes on people with care experience, alongside those who formally share a Protected Characteristic;
5. to formally call upon all other bodies to treat care experience as a Protected Characteristic until such time as it may be introduced by legislation;
6. to formally call upon all other bodies to adopt corporate parenting for children in care and care leavers until such time as it may be introduced by legislation;
7. for the Council to proactively seek out and listen to the voices of care experienced people when developing new policies based on their views.