

Wolverhampton City Council Corporate Parenting Council Strategy 2015/2016

Foreword

There are very few responsibilities and duties undertaken by the Council and its partners which are more important or pose a greater challenge than that of Corporate Parenting. Wolverhampton City Council takes these duties very seriously and has high aspirations for all of our children who are looked after. We recognise that a whole Council response is required to respond to their need with a coordinated and concerted approach towards developing policies, initiatives, services and budget priorities. In pursuance of this we are encouraged as Councillors, Officers and Partner Agencies to consider the following three questions:

Is this good enough for my child?

Would this have been good enough for me as a child?

Is this the best that we can achieve?

Wolverhampton City Council must work positively with its partner agencies, providing the platforms and levels of excellence to ask all our partners to share our ambitions for Looked after Children. This Corporate Parenting Strategy forms both our statement of intent and vision for the next three years and includes our Pledge to all Looked after Children.

Signed.....
Lead Member for CYP

Signed.....
Director of Children and Young
People

Corporate Parenting Strategy Aims

Wolverhampton Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy for Looked after Children demonstrates the Council's commitment to furthering the life chances of every child and young person in its care. It aims to improve their outcomes, narrowing the gap between them and their peers, by providing effective support which enables them to reach their full potential. The overall aim of the Strategy is to reinforce the corporate responsibility of the whole Council and its partner agencies through commitment to the development of policies, initiatives, services and budget prioritising. This Strategy requires the active engagement of all service departments of Wolverhampton City Council, Elected Members and Partners.

What is Corporate Parenting?

“As the Corporate Parent of children in care we have a special responsibility for their

well-being. Like any good parent, it should put its own children first. That means being a powerful advocate for them to receive the best of everything and helping them to make a success of their lives¹” (DFES 2006)

The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced by the Government in 1998 as part of a drive to improve the lives of children who are looked after by the local authority. The Corporate Parenting responsibility was reiterated and reinforced in 2007 with the release of the White Paper Care Matters-Time for Change and the underpinning legislation, Children and Young People Act 2008.

Wolverhampton City Council and its Partners have a legal and moral duty towards all of its Looked after Children and Care-leavers to offer them the kind of support a good parent would provide. Importantly, Wolverhampton City Council's Corporate Parenting responsibility cannot be implemented by services targeted at children alone. It emphasises the collective responsibility of the Local Authority to achieve good parenting including services such as housing, regeneration and leisure. It is also important to note that every elected member of the Council has the specific responsibility of acting as a corporate parent.

Corporate Parenting is different from ‘ordinary’ parenting, in that the focus is not necessarily on forming personal relationships with individual children. Corporate Parenting is about prioritising and championing Looked after Children and this will look very different in different areas of the authority. Below are examples of what Corporate Parenting could look like across Wolverhampton City Council.

- Communications & PR: Prioritising news stories about Looked after Children which help to breakdown stigma of what a Looked after Child is both in the authority and also with the wider public.
- Library services: Provide all Looked after Children with their own library card when they come into care which can follow them around their placements.
- Planning: Consideration of Corporate Parenting responsibilities when a new children’s home is being proposed.
- Procurement: Building into all contracts that any companies working for WCC or Partners that they will offer Work Experience to Looked after Children or prioritise Care Leavers in apprenticeship roles.
- Culture & Leisure Services: To offer specific initiatives to Looked after Children and carers, including free or discounted entrance to venues such as theatres, art galleries, swimming pools etc.
- Housing: A designated link in housing for fostering services.
- ICT Services: Offer ICT support sessions to Looked after Children and their carers.

What is the role of our Partners

Whilst this is a Wolverhampton City Council Strategy it is vital that we recognise the importance of our Partners in the statutory, private and third sector. Wolverhampton City Council alone cannot meet the needs of Looked after Children and Care

¹ Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice, NCB 2008

Leavers and needs to work effectively with partners to demonstrate our Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Whilst this strategy is a Wolverhampton City Council document it is hoped that it will be adopted by our Partners and the resultant Action Plan is held across all the sectors.

Who are our Looked after Children?

As Corporate Parents it is important for everyone to have a clear and accurate picture of who our Looked after Children are in order to be able to plan and commission services to best meet their needs. At 1st June 2015:

- 774 children are being looked after by the Local Authority . This is a slight decrease 783 at 31 March 2014;
- 47 (6%) live in residential children's homes, of whom approximately 59% live out of the authority area.
- 2 live in residential special schools, all of whom live out of the authority area.
- 571 (73%) live with foster families, of whom 62 % live out of the authority area.
- 86 children live with parents or persons with parental responsibility.
- 0 children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- 96 (12%) of looked after children have a decision that they should be adopted; with 26 of those children currently being placed with their adoptive parents.
- 46% of LAC are in placements that are outside of Wolverhampton

The term 'looked after' is applied to any child whom the Authority is providing accommodation for where they are subject to care orders (Section 31) or where children are accommodated through a voluntary agreement and parents' consent.(Section 20). This strategy refers to all children and young people looked after by Wolverhampton City Council regardless of the route taken in to care and their legal status.

Looked after Children are recognised as among the most vulnerable children in our society. Children become looked after for a wide range of reasons, many will have been affected by distressing and traumatic life experiences including physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect. Some may come into care because of the illness or death of a parent, others may have a disability or complex needs

As a result of their experiences and coming into the care system, children may experience disrupted education and multiple care placements; they may have difficulties with their social and emotional well-being and lack stable relationships in their life. However placement stability is improving in Wolverhampton: which shows that looked after children in Wolverhampton generally benefit from stable placements with 89% of children and young people who have been in care for 12 months or more having less than 3 placements in the last 12 months and almost half of all LAC have had less than 3 placements since coming into care.(September 2014)

It is important that we recognise that as Corporate Parents we have a responsibility to our care leavers too. In June 2015 63% of carer leavers were in education, employment or training between three months before and one month after their 19th

birthday. Again this has improved since February 2014 for which the outturn was 42%.

Key Legislation & Local Policies

- Children Act 1989
- Quality Protects 1998
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Every Child Matters 2003 & Children Act 2004
- Care Matters 2007 & Children Act 2008 –
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Wolverhampton City Council Children, Young Peoples and Families Plan 2015-2025
- Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy 2014-2017
- Statutory guidance on promoting the educational achievement of looked after children - Department for Education 2014
- In 2014, Wolverhampton will publish its Children, Young People and Families Plan (2014 – 24): the 10 year framework gives scope to improve the health, well-being and cohesiveness of families and the vision is 'Healthy, Happy Families': The four priorities are to:
 1. Reduce the harm caused by child poverty
 2. Increase achievement and involvement in education, training and employment
 3. Make families stronger (LAC/Toxic Trio)
 4. Improve the health of CYP and their families (infant mortality/childhood obesity/Toxic Trio)
- Looked after Children Service Action Plan 2014
- CAMHS strategy for Looked after Children

Elected Members and Governance

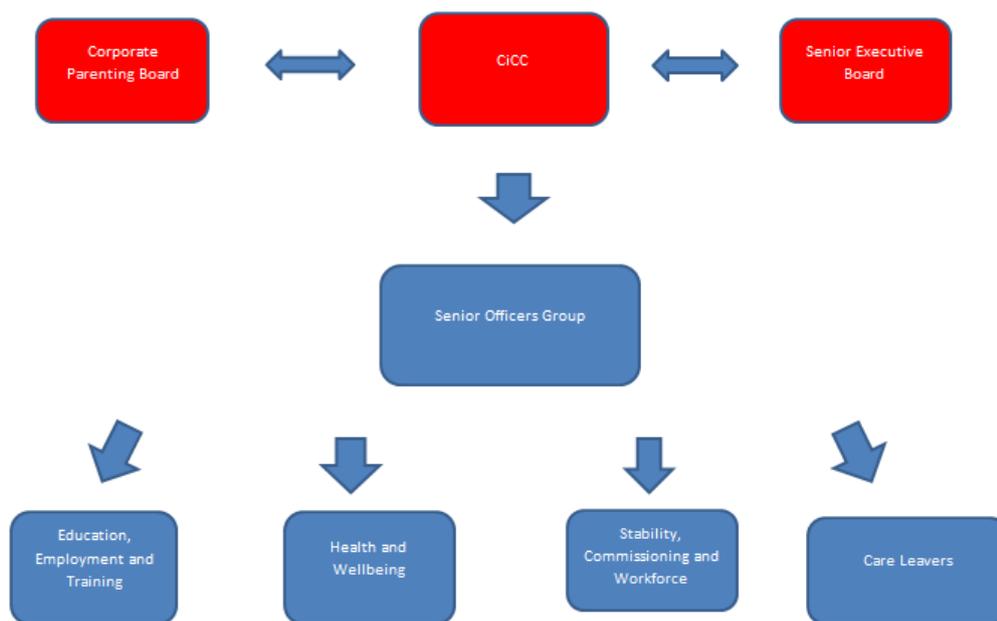
Elected Members have a specific responsibility for children and young people who are looked after. The DFES in 2003 published guidance for all councillors about how to be a good corporate parent, *If This Were My Child*² states:

- Councillors have a clear responsibility to ensure that the services being provided to children in their care are of the highest quality.
- Councillors have no greater responsibility than when they act as corporate parent.
- Councillors' role is crucial not just in drawing up policies, but in setting standards and seeing that they are met.
- Councillors should be involved in the setting of a vision and strategic objectives for looked after children and young people.

While all Members have a duty to ensure that the Council fulfils its responsibilities to its Looked after Children, Members who are appointed to the Corporate Parenting Panel have a specific responsibility to oversee this area of Council responsibilities. In Wolverhampton City Council the Lead Member for Children and Young People chairs the cross-party Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP), the chair of the local Foster Care Association and two members of the Children in Care Council also sit on this panel. The CPP is currently a regulatory panel with scrutiny being carried out by the Children and Young people Scrutiny panel.

Officers from across Wolverhampton City Council and its Partner Agencies are represented and held accountable at a senior level through the Corporate Parenting Strategic Officers Group. This Group has a responsibility for leadership, vision and implementation of the strategy. Themed Corporate Parenting Operational Officers Groups will be formed to move forward the action plan resulting from this strategy. The Children in Care Council will have responsibility for monitoring the Young Person's action plan that results from this Strategy and are consulted on each of the key service area reports on LAC, providing a response to accompany each report so that the views LAC are captured as well as those of elected members at CPP meetings (this is a new initiative for 2014).

The CiCC are also interested members of The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel, having their own session dedicated to LAC.(this is a new initiative for 2015)



The participation of Looked after Children in Corporate Parenting

It is essential that the voices of Looked after Children are heard and considered in the shaping of services that support them. Planning how to meet the needs of Looked after Children has to be an endeavour based upon their full and active engagement and participation both on an individual and group basis

The Participation Officer for LAC now works in partnership with the Participation Officer for the Wider Youth Council and are now supporting each other with their councils, this new structure will enable information and opportunities to work in sync with each other and work plans reflect the priorities of both.

The CiCC, which meets monthly, is hosted in the Council Chambers to reflect the importance that Wolverhampton City Council places on the views and experiences of Children in Care.

LAC members are involved in the recruitment and selection of Children and Families Staff.

Corporate Parenting Strategic Priorities 2015-16

Previous strategies have highlighted key priorities and these priorities have been continually monitored, measured and progress made. These priorities continue to be important developments for meeting the needs of Children and Young People in Care and the council's commitment to Corporate Parenting. Further Priorities have been developed as a result of consultation and feedback from LAC and CiCC which focuses the strategy on nine priority areas:

- Priority One. “Have services understand us better.”
- Priority Two. “Focus on the positive things we do”
- Priority Three. “Help us to make achievements”
- *Priority Four. “Help us to spend time with children who aren’t in care”*
- Priority Five. “Keep siblings together & give us more contact with siblings.”
 “Let us make choices about school.”
 “Give us more information and support about sexual health.”

- Priority Six. Maximise access to work experience and apprenticeship opportunities for LAC and Care Leavers
- Priority Seven. Strengthen care leavers’ preparation for independence, teaching independence skills from an earlier age and increasing access to life story work
- Priority Eight. Partnership between health and education to offer cohesive and knowledgeable Support for LAC
- Priority Nine. Make placements changes more positive, by preparing young people about what the family and the community might be able to offer

To formulate an action plan for delivery on all of these key priorities the senior officers group will nominate operational colleagues and influence the development and design of the agendas for these working groups in the following areas. Please see the 2015/2016 Corporate Parenting Action Plan.