

City of Wolverhampton Council
Corporate Parenting Strategy for Looked After Children 2015-2017

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. The City of Wolverhampton 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?

The City of Wolverhampton 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 two years and includes our Pledge to all Looked After Children.

Signed
Lead Member for CYP

Signed
Strategic Director People

Corporate Parenting Strategy Aims

The City of 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 the City of Wolverhampton Council, Councillors 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” Department for Education & Skills (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.

The City of Wolverhampton 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, the City of Wolverhampton 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 the City of Wolverhampton 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 any new children’s homes are being proposed.
- Procurement: Building into all contracts that any companies working for City of Wolverhampton Council 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 City of Wolverhampton Council Strategy, it is vital that we recognise the importance of our partners in the statutory, private and third sector. The City of Wolverhampton Council alone cannot meet the needs of Looked After Children and Care Leavers and needs to work effectively with partners to demonstrate our

¹ Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice, NCB 2008

Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Whilst this strategy is a City of Wolverhampton Council document, our partners are positively engaged and it is envisaged the strategy will be adopted 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 31st October 2015:

- 703 children are Looked After at 31/10/2015
- 39 (5.5%) live in residential children's homes, of whom approximately 71% (28) live out of the authority area
- 1 lives in residential special schools out of the authority area
- 518 (73%) live with foster families, of whom 56% (290) live out of the authority area
- 17% of LAC live 20+ miles from Wolverhampton
- 62 children live with parents or persons with parental responsibility
- 4 children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- 91 (13%) of Looked After Children have a decision that they should be adopted; with 52 of those children currently being placed with their adoptive parents
- 49% 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 the City of Wolverhampton Council regardless of the route taken in to care and their legal status. It also includes all Care Leavers whom were previously looked after by the authority.

Looked After Children are recognised as one of the most vulnerable group of 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.

In addition, it is important that we recognise that as Corporate Parents we have a responsibility to our care leavers too, ensuring young people have opportunity to partake in education, employment or training opportunities when they leave school or college, are supported into independence and have the right support around them to progress into adulthood.

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
- Statutory guidance on promoting the educational achievement of Looked After Children - Department for Education 2014
- City of Wolverhampton Council Corporate Plan 2015-2016
- Wolverhampton's Children, Young Peoples and Families Plan 2015-2025
- Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy 2014-2017

Councillors and Governance

All councillors 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 councillors have a duty to ensure that the Council fulfils its responsibilities to its Looked After Children, those who are appointed to the Corporate Parenting Board have a specific responsibility to oversee this area of Council responsibilities. In the City of Wolverhampton Council the Lead Member for Children and Young People chairs the cross-party Corporate Parenting Board (CPB). The CPB is currently a regulatory panel with scrutiny being carried out by the Children and Young People Scrutiny panel.

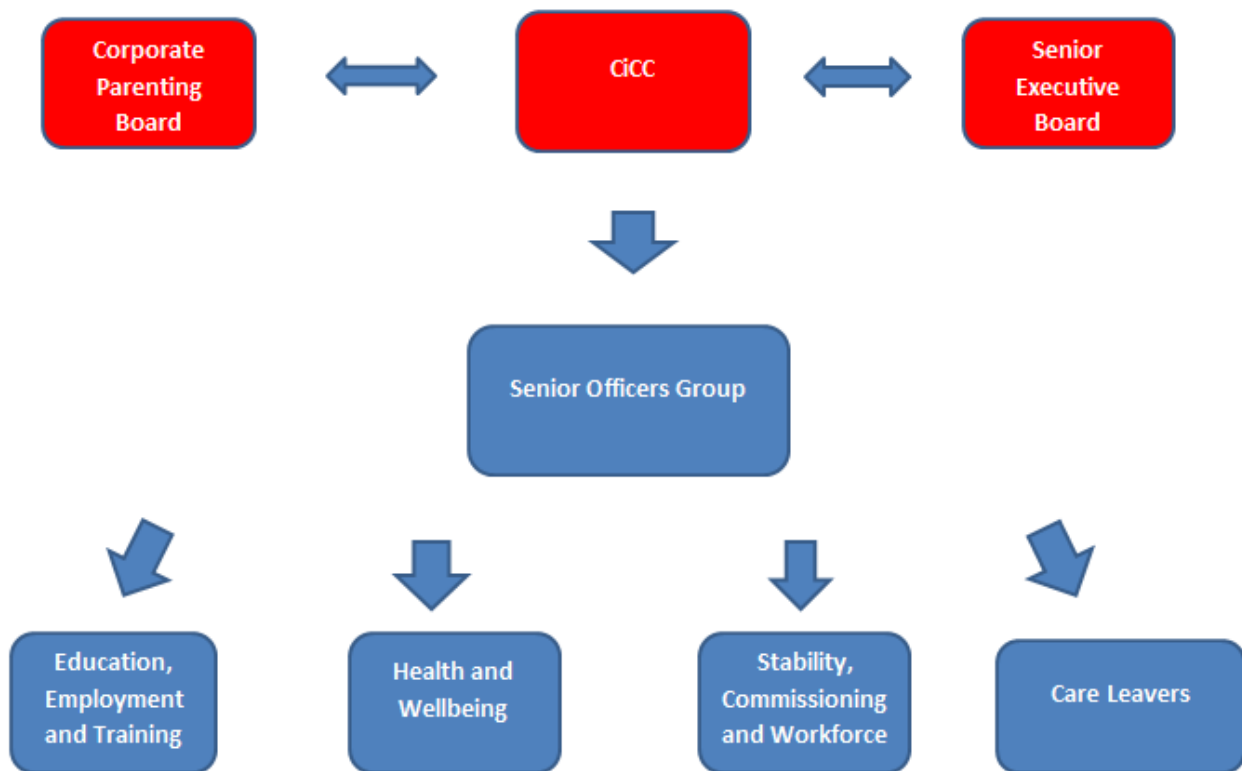
Officers from across the City of Wolverhampton Council and its Partner Agencies are represented and held accountable at a senior level through the Corporate Parenting Strategic Officers' Group. This group has a responsibility for leadership, vision and implementation of the strategy. Themed Corporate Parenting Operational Officers Groups will be formed to move forward the action plan resulting from this strategy. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) 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 councillors at CPB meetings.

²

If this were my child, A councillors guide to being a good corporate parent, DFES 2003

The CiCC have strong links with the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel, having had their own session dedicated to LAC.

The New Belongings project has been launched in 2015 and is aimed at improving support for Care Leavers. This is supported by the Care Leavers Forum who meet monthly. Their role is to evaluate and monitor the New Belongings action plan which sits alongside the action plan for the Corporate Parenting strategy.



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 they support 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 the City of Wolverhampton Council places on the views and experiences of Children in Care. In addition, members of the CiCC and the care Leavers Forum are involved in the recruitment and selection of Children and Young People employees.

Corporate Parenting Strategic Priorities 2015-17

Previous strategies have highlighted key priorities and these priorities have been continually monitored, measured and progressed. 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 key requirements have been developed as a result of consultation and feedback from Looked After Children (LAC) and Children in Care Council (CiCC) in June 2014 and May 2015. This consultation has led to a refresh of the strategy with emphasis on four areas of focus which incorporates all of the key requirements laid down by the CiCC.

Areas of Focus	Key requirements
Education, Employment and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help young people to make achievements. Encourage young people to be involved in making choices about school. • Maximise access to work experience and apprenticeship opportunities for LAC and Care Leavers including a specific dedicated programme within the City of Wolverhampton Council
Health and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share more information and support about sexual health • Develop partnership between health and education to offer cohesive and knowledgeable support for LAC especially in relation to health appointments and recorded absence
Social Skills and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure LAC are able to access universal services enabling them to spend time with children who aren't in care • Keep siblings together & encourage more contact with siblings • Strengthen care leavers' preparation for independence, teaching independence skills from an earlier age and increasing access to life story work • Make placements changes more positive, by preparing young people about what the family and the community might be able to offer
Corporate Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure services understand LAC and Care Leavers better and support offered reflects their needs • Strengthen the social work workforce to ensure that they are skilled, knowledgeable and stable in order to meet the needs of our LAC population • Focus on the positive things we do

To progress these four key areas of focus an annual action plan will be developed, monitored and progressed by the Corporate Parenting Senior Officers group. Progress will be overseen by the Corporate Parenting Board, CiCC and the Strategic Executive Board, all whom will receive regular updates.