

# Members Full Guide - Corporate Parenting



**Wolverhampton**  
City Council



# Contents

- 1 Corporate Parenting - The Responsibility Of Members ..... 2
- 2 Being On Corporate Parenting Panel - Some Key Roles ..... 4
- 3 Wolverhampton Foster Care Association ..... 9
- 4 Corporate Parenting Strategy ..... 10
- 5 The Council's Pledge ..... 12
- 6 Corporate Parenting - Pledge ..... 13

# 1. Corporate Parenting - The Responsibility Of Members

*“As the corporate parents of children in care we have a special responsibility for their well-being. Like any good parent, it should put its own children first. This means being a powerful advocate for them to receive the best of everything and helping them to make a success of their lives”.*

DFES 2006

## a. What is Corporate Parenting?

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 Local Authorities. In essence, it is a simple, yet very demanding expectation placed on Local Authorities. Corporate Parenting means that Wolverhampton City Council has a legal and moral duty towards its Looked After Children to provide the kind of support that any good parent would provide for their own children. Corporate Parenting emphasises that it is the City Council as a whole and not just the Children & Young People’s Service that has the responsibility for every child it looks after.

That responsibility ultimately of course rests on Members - in fact the concept of Corporate Parenting was first established by the Secretary of State for Health in 1998 when he wrote to all Members of each Local Authority alerting them to their responsibilities in this regard. The concept has been strengthened by subsequent communications from central government and found expression in Every Child Matters and The Children Act 2004, and more recently Care Matters - Time for Change and the CYP Act 2008.

## b. What are the Implications of Corporate Parenting for Members?

The requirements of corporate parenting mean that every Member, on top of any other specific areas of interest or responsibility, is accountable for the welfare of the children looked after by us. While some Members will carry specific responsibilities for children and young people, all Members should therefore at least consider the following questions:

- How much do we know about the children for whom we are responsible?
- Am I satisfied that appropriate arrangements have been made by the Council to fulfil our responsibilities?
- How does my particular area of interest consider the needs of Looked After Children in its decision-making and delivery of services?
- What else could different parts of the Council do to support Looked After Children.

The basic question that all Members need to ask is “Are we doing for our Looked After Children what we would expect any good parent to do?” This is a simple question with massive implications for the Council which has at its disposal enormous influence and resources covering many aspects of the lives of Wolverhampton residents - as a good parent, how can we best use those to benefit our Looked After Children?

### c. Who are our Looked After Children?

At any one time, Wolverhampton looks after more than 550 children and young people. They range in age from 0-17 and may be looked after by us by agreement with their parents or by warrant of a court order. The reasons why children need to be looked after vary, but fundamentally children become looked after because their families are unable to look after them. This may be owing to a variety of issues:

- There may be a short term crisis (e.g. single parent needing to go into hospital);
- there may be longer term concerns (e.g. where parents neglect or abuse their children);
- there may be a child whose need their family cannot meet (e.g. a severely disabled child);
- or there may be a major breakdown in relationships within the family (e.g. between a teenager and their parents).

Before a child become looked after, social workers are committed to exploring other less intrusive options such as finding family members/close friends who may be willing to care for a child.

Children can be looked after for short or long periods of time and may be looked after in foster homes or residential children's homes. If it is clear that a child is not going to be able to return home, social workers will try to identify the best "permanent" option for a child to see them through into adulthood. In most cases this will be in a family setting, such as a foster home or for younger children, adoption will often be the preferred option. In some cases where children are looked after via a Care Order made in court, social workers may decide that family circumstances have improved so much that a child can return home - in these cases, even though the child lives at home, the Local Authority retains its corporate parenting responsibilities, for as long as the order is in place.

### d. Leaving Care

The requirement for Local Authorities to act as a good parent extends to young people who were looked after in their later years of childhood and have now left the care system. In Wolverhampton we have responsibility for around 180 care leavers. Young people in this position leave care sometime between their 16th and 18th birthdays, depending on their circumstances. The statutory responsibilities towards these "care leavers" naturally reduces as they move into adulthood, but in some cases, our responsibilities as a parent, extend well into a young person's early 20's, upto 25, if they remain in further or higher education. With regard to Care Leavers, our corporate parenting obligations relate in particular to matters such as:

- Are we supporting Care Leavers in achieving educationally?
- Are we doing what we can to ensure Care Leavers have jobs?
- Are we ensuring that our Care Leavers have somewhere decent to live?

Clearly, many parts of the City Council have much to contribute in answering those questions as they have in relation to the questions asked of us in relation to all the Looked After Children entrusted to our care.

## 2. Being On Corporate Parenting Panel – Some Key Roles

While all Members have a duty to ensure that the Council fulfils its responsibilities to its Looked After Children, Members appointed to the Corporate Parenting Panel have particular responsibilities to oversee this area of Council responsibilities. To enable them to do this, they will be presented with relevant information, be asked to comment on policy and practice issues and be given the opportunity to have direct contact with Looked After Children and the staff caring for them.

### a. Information

The Council's performance in relation to Looked After Children is measured against certain key performance indicators while we also establish additional local indicators from time to time. Key monitoring information is made available on the intranet and is available to Panel Members in the form of a Balanced Scorecard. Some of the key indicators, and the thinking behind them, are outlined below to assist Members in scrutinising the information available to them. There will often be historic performance information and targets set to assist Members in judging the information.

#### i) Numbers of Children in Residential and Foster Placements:

There are two key issues at stake here: firstly it is preferable in most cases that we find family placements for children who cannot live with their own families and therefore we would want to see more children in foster placements than residential; secondly it is usually preferable for children and a much better use of resources, for children & young people to be in local in-house resources.

#### ii) Children In Other Placements

If a child is not able to live with his or her birth parents, then if possible we will place with adults known to them - relatives or friends. If a child has little or no chance of returning to her or his birth family then we will try to secure a permanent new family preferably through adoption - although adoption becomes less likely as children get older and would be rare for children over 10. Thus we would want to see "healthy" numbers of children placed with relatives or placed for adoption. You will get to know what a "healthy" figure looks like over time as you see the figures month-by-month.

Sometimes if circumstances change, a child on a Care Order can be returned to her or his birth parents, so it is normal to have a small number of children recorded in this category however, in these cases you would expect to see the Authority returning to court to discharge unnecessary Care Orders and so this figure should rarely rise significantly where practice is consistently good.



**v) Participation in Reviews**

Every Looked After Child is entitled to an independent review of the plans being made for them on a regular basis. Children four and over should have the chance to contribute to these reviews directly or indirectly - how successful are we in this?

**vi) Timeliness of Reviews**

A Looked After Child should have their plan reviewed every 6 months at least.

**vi) Stability of Placement**

It is going to be difficult for a child in care to be happy or to do well at school if they keep being moved from placement to placement. We measure the percentage of our Looked After Children who move 3 or more times in a year. We also measure how many children in long term care have been in the same placement for the last two years (or have moved into a permanent adoption placement).

**viii) After Care**

Once a young person leaves care, we have an obligation to offer ongoing advice and support. If Care Leavers go to university, our obligations are more extensive. We cannot meet any of our obligations if we lose touch, so we keep track of how many care leavers are still in touch at 19. We do also keep track of how many Care Leavers are in education, training or employment at 19.

## **ix) Family Placement**

As noted, we prefer to see Looked After Children placed in families. Virtually all our children under 10 would be in families, so we measure how many 10-16 year olds are in family placements.

## **x) Well being of Looked After Children**

We are not just responsible for where Looked After Children live, but for their whole welfare. Looked After Children are entitled to an annual health and dental check, to have an agreed Personal Education Plan and to have an appropriate education placement with which they are actively engaged. We therefore monitor our performance in all these areas.

## **xi) Other**

Other pieces of information are included on the Balanced Scorecard (e.g. the number of Looked After Children) while other information can be made available on request (e.g. ethnic/age/gender breakdown).

## **b. Policy & Practice**

Policy and procedures applying to Looked After Children are to be found on the Intranet and are included in the Children and Families Procedures Manual. However as this manual is only reviewed every 2 - 3 years, new legislation or new developments often demand new policies. These tend to be approved via the Children & Families Management Team and referred through to the Senior Management Board and Lead Member as appropriate. Where such new or revised policies impact significantly on Looked After Children, then they are likely to be referred to Corporate Parenting Panel for comment.

## **c. Direct Contact**

Members sitting on the Corporate Parenting Panel are expected to familiarise themselves more directly with different parts of the service the Local Authority provide for Looked After Children. Members of the Panel are asked to visit services directly in order to familiarise themselves with current realities and most importantly, to satisfy themselves that services are working well and appropriate systems are in place. As such visits may bring Members into direct contact with children and young people, Members are required to complete a satisfactory enhanced CRB check prior to undertaking such visits.

It is possible for Members to visit unannounced, however in the first instance it is better to arrange to meet the relevant manager who can then induct you into that particular team or service. Support will be offered both in arranging the visits and on the visit itself by the Corporate Parenting Officer. When visiting residential units, it is vital to remember that this may be a child's



long term home - you are visiting their home ground and need to be mindful and respectful of this. You should take the advice of managers or staff in relation to any young people present and of course observe basic sensible child protection practices; thus while Members will want to hear the views of young people, Members should avoid meeting alone with a young person behind a closed door and should never agree to speak with a young person in their bedroom - you may wish to check what bedrooms in a unit look like, but this should only ever be done in the company of a staff member and with the permission of the young person. If you are not known at a unit, do not expect to be admitted if you do not have any identification with you.

Below are the range of services you may have the opportunity to engage with:

**a) Mainstream Residential Units**

Wolverhampton runs a number of small residential homes for 12 - 17 year olds and has also commissioned units from a private provider. The units tend to be 4 bedded although some may also have flatlets attached for older young people being prepared for moving into their own accommodation. One unit tends to receive new admissions to care who stay until a longer term placement is found, other units tend to have more stable populations where young people may live for a year or more.

**b) Short-Break Units**

Many families struggle to cope with the demands of caring for disabled children, the challenge may be behavioural, such as children with severe autism or be very physically demanding such as older children who are immobile. To support these families we are able to provide short breaks (e.g. a weekend or a week during the holiday season) for the children. We have two residential units providing this service. For the time they are with us, these children have Looked After status (although we do not include them in calculating our Looked After population or in the general Looked After Children's performance measures outlined above).

**c) Social Work Teams**

Most new referrals come through our Duty & Assessment Team, based at the Civic Centre. This team may bring children into the care system in emergencies and on a daily basis is making decisions about whether children referred to it are safe at home or whether action, such as removal to care, needs to be taken. If you are linked with this team, your focus needs to be on whether that decision-making process is operating safely for children and young people.

Children and young people coming into care will tend after the initial contact to be dealt with by either the Disability Team or by one of three locality teams. These teams are responsible for ensuring that proper plans are made for children coming into care.



Children and young people who are likely to remain in care long term will be the responsibility of one of two Looked After Children teams. These teams are responsible for ensuring that Looked After Children are in safe, caring placements, that good plans are in place for their future right into adulthood and that their health and educational needs are all met. You may want to ask staff and managers how they are ensuring these things - have all their Looked After Children had health checks for instance and how do managers know that this has happened?

There is also a fostering team and an adoption team. While these teams do have some direct responsibilities for Looked After Children, their prime roles are to recruit, train and support foster carers or adopters and to ensure that we have enough foster and adoptive placements to meet the needs of our Looked After Children. You may want to explore how managers oversee targets for recruitment, or how they ensure that foster carers or adopters are regularly visited and supported by their staff or how they are trying to recruit foster carers or adopters for Looked After Children who are black or Asian - or what support is in place for foster carers or adopters who may be caring for children from ethnic backgrounds different to their own.

### 3. Wolverhampton Foster Care Association

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All current Foster Carers and those newly approved by Wolverhampton City Council fostering panel become automatic members of our Foster Care Association. Wolverhampton FCA is a registered charity which works to support the needs of foster carers across Wolverhampton.

## 4. Corporate Parenting Strategy

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 sets out our vision for Wolverhampton City Council and its partners for Corporate Parenting for the next 3 years 2011-14. It aspires to improve the outcomes of Looked after Children and Care Leavers, 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.

The strategy sets out 4 key priorities; these four areas have been identified for development over the next three years and have been restricted to an achievable amount. Actions have been developed to address these priorities in the Corporate Parenting Action Plan which is expected to be a live document and will be reviewed annually.

In recognition of the importance of the Looked after Children's participation in the shaping of services, the framing of the strategic priorities has been based on priorities identified by the young people themselves.

### Priority One

"Have services understand us better."

#### A Corporate Strategic Commitment

In order to achieve the aspirations we must hold for children and young people who are looked after, a whole Council approach is required with practical support offered by all services within the Council. Wolverhampton City Council and its Partners will strive to ensure that all services understand their responsibilities as a Corporate Parent and how they can meet these. The Council and Partners will strive to breakdown stereotypes and stigmas associated with their Looked after Children. Corporate Parenting will be demonstrated through a Council wide and Partners commitment to a range of initiatives aiming to improve outcomes for Looked after Children and Careleavers.

### Priority Two

"Focus on the positive things we do"

#### Ensure the Positive Active Participation and Involvement of all Looked after Children

Care Matters highlighted the importance of young people's participation in shaping the services that support them. It is essential therefore that as (corporate) parent's we communicate effectively with our Looked after Children. Whilst there have been developments in the active involvement of Looked after Children including the creation of a Children in Care Council and appointment of two participation workers, it is recognised that significant progress still needs to be made.

## Priority Three

“Help us to make achievements”

“Help us to spend time with children who aren’t in care”

### **Improved access to universal services for all LAC and care-leavers**

It is recognised that Looked after Children often struggle to access universal services such as play and youth services, leisure and sport provision and those provided by the third sector. Care Matters reports that nationally over 50% of young people who are looked after have difficulties accessing positive activities. It is important that universal services look at how they can adapt or offer additional support to enable LAC to access their provisions.

## Priority Four

“Keep siblings together & give us more contact with siblings.”

“Let us make choices about school.”

“Give us more information and support about sexual health.”

### **Improve outcomes for Looked after Children in Health, Education, Placements and Transitions**

These four areas have been identified as key areas for development over the next three years both by professionals and young people consulted. Despite significant advances at both a local and national level, the outcomes for Looked after Children are still significantly poorer than for those who live at home. The educational attainment of Looked after Children continues to sit considerably below that of children who live at home both nationally and locally. Nationally children often enter the care system with a worse level of health than their peers and their longer term outcomes remain worse. The Department of Health reports that 45% of Looked after Children were assessed as having a mental health disorder, rising to 72% of those in residential care. The Fostering Network suggests that nationally there is currently a shortfall of 10,000 foster families. The Centre for Social Justice state that care-leavers are far more likely to end up in jail, on drugs, on the streets, or to be teenage parents than their peers. For example, 27% of the prison population, and half of all prisoners under 25, were in care.

## 5. The Council's Pledge

While the Lead Member for Children & Young People and members of the Scrutiny and Corporate Parenting Panels need to take specific interest in Looked After Children, as noted at the beginning of this document, corporate parenting is a responsibility that falls on the whole of the Council, its Members and Officers.

One of the key expressions of this is the pledge made by Wolverhampton City Council. The pledge is our promise to all our young people in care and care leavers about the type and quality of service they can expect to receive. It covers all areas of young people's development and requires a whole Council approach to deliver.

The Corporate Parenting Panel therefore need to scrutinise what the whole of the Council, Members and Officers, is doing to meet the terms of this pledge.

The Council has massive resources at its disposal; the Corporate Parenting Panel is charged with ensuring that these resources are deployed to the benefit of Looked After Children. There is no other group within our City towards whom the Council has such extensive responsibilities - the responsibilities of a parent and, as the numbers are limited, there is no reason given the will to do so, why the Council's resources should not be effectively deployed to make a real difference to the lives of these most vulnerable our of citizens.

For a hard copy of the pledge contact Jenny Cockcroft, Corporate Parenting Officer (01902) 553001 or [jenny.cockcroft@wolverhampton.gov.uk](mailto:jenny.cockcroft@wolverhampton.gov.uk)

## 6. Corporate Parenting - Pledge

### **Wolverhampton's Pledge**

We have made promises to all our Looked after Children and Care Leavers and this pledge tells you what they are.

We are writing down our promises so you will know what we should be doing.

### **"We will be good corporate parents"**

#### **This means:**

Across the Council and our Partners the needs of all of our Looked after Children and Care Leavers will be a priority.

Helping everyone that works in the Council and our Partners to understand their responsibility to you and all Looked after Children and Care Leavers.

Helping to promote a positive image of all Looked after Children and Care Leavers.

Celebrating your achievements every year.

Offering you a 'Role Model' (Years 9-11) and work experience to all our Care Leavers.

### **"We will help you to get the best education"**

#### **This means:**

Making sure you have a place at a school that is right for you and give you every support to stay there.

Making sure that pre-school children are able to receive high quality early years education.

Involving you in regular PEPs that encourage you to have high ambitions and help you get the best results.

Giving you access to a computer and the internet to help your learning.

Providing additional support including 1:1 tuition when you need it.

### **"We will help you to be fit and healthy"**

#### **This means:**

Having a specialist nurse to help you with any health problems and make sure your carers are keeping you healthy.

Having access to an expert to support your emotional health when you are finding it hard to cope.

Staff and carers will be trained in health issues such as relationship and sexual education so that can support you better.

Having a health plan with regular health assessments including dental and opticians.

Helping you to access sport and leisure activities.

## **“We will help you to have your say”**

### **This means:**

Providing you with opportunities where you can tell us what you think and together we can plan for all Looked after Children and Care Leavers. Fully involving you in decisions made about your life, including making sure you are actively involved in your review.

Involving young people in the recruitment and training of staff responsible for delivering services to Looked after Children and Care Leavers.

Working with young people to develop a website that will share up to date news and information with you.

Making sure you can have an advocate to talk with if you have any issues or problems.

## **“We will give you somewhere safe and happy to live”**

### **This means**

Giving you high quality carers who can meet your individual needs.

Where possible we will let you live with your brothers and sisters.

Supporting you if and when you are able to return to your family.

Providing training to your carers so that they understand specific issues that affect you and other Looked after Children.

Making sure if you move that you have bags or suitcases and that your belongings are never put in a black bin bag.

## **“We will help you have fun!”**

### **This means:**

Encouraging you to access a wide range of positive activities including some just for Looked after Children and Care leavers.

Helping you and your carers to know what is going on in your local area.

You will not miss out on holidays because you don't have a passport or other travel documents (providing you are entitled to these).

So you can have worry free sleepovers we will make sure all staff and carers understand the policy.

Celebrating your birthday and special occasions with you.

## **“We will help you see the people important to you”**

### **This means:**

Making sure you have regular contact which happens when you expect it to, as long as it's safe.

Giving you fun and interesting places to have contact.

Offering you different methods to have contact with your siblings including phone, post and internet (when it is safe to do so).

Helping you to stay in touch with your friends.

Providing you with an independent visitor if you want one.



## **“We will help you prepare for your future”**

### **This means:**

Providing you with support until you are 21 or 24 if its agreed you need support in education, employment or training.

Helping you to find somewhere safe and suitable to live.

Supporting you to develop independent living skills and prepare you for the world of work.

Supporting you to make choices about your future including University, Apprenticeships or Further Education.

Helping you to get a provisional driving licence.

## **“We will provide you with the best service possible”**

### **This means:**

Having a qualified social worker who visits you regularly and listens to you.

Not changing your social worker unless it is absolutely necessary and if they do we will make sure you get a chance to say goodbye.

Having a Safeguarding Review manager who will listen to you and make sure people do what they say they are going to do.

Listening to you about when you want your meetings and who you want there.

Making sure you are able to make a complaint if you are not happy.



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