

Corporate Parenting Strategy

2011-2013

***Securing the achievement and well-being of looked
after children in Dudley***

Foreword by The Leader and Cabinet Member

Children and young people looked after by Dudley Council are amongst the most vulnerable members of our society. We recognise that fulfilling our responsibilities, as corporate parent is critical to them achieving the outcomes every good parent would want for their own children.

In terms of the delivery of Council services, children are at the top of the corporate agenda: we all have a duty to ask ourselves:

If this were my child, would it be good enough for them?

In Dudley we are committed to providing services across the Council for children and young people which are responsive to their needs, provide them with stability, enable them to achieve their potential, and assist them in becoming confident and secure adults. Through the Children and Young People's Partnership and other agencies, we will work closely with our partners, such as the Primary Care Trust (PCT), Connexions Service, and the voluntary, community and private sectors, in seeking innovative ways to meet the needs of children and young people in our care. A key element of our approach will be to work closely with the *Children in Care Council* who will monitor and review this strategy in conjunction with the delivery of *The Pledge* to looked after children and young people.

Every elected member is a Corporate Parent and all members and officers of the Council have a responsibility to improve the outcomes of children and young people in care. Dudley Council and its partners embrace this message and are working towards narrowing the gap between the achievements and aspirations of children and young people in our care, and their peers in the wider community.

This document highlights the collective responsibility in fulfilling our duty as corporate parent to all young people looked after by the Council or who are care leavers. It also outlines the underpinning framework that will ensure looked after children, young people and care leavers:

- Are healthy and safe;
- Have greater opportunities to achieve at school, in training and employment;
- Benefit from leisure, sport and cultural experiences.

The strategy sets out the objectives and key actions under the Every Child Matters framework, and reflects the principles set out by the Children and Young People's Partnership. The plan encompasses our response to the proposals in the White Paper, Care Matters: Time for change to improving the quality of corporate parenting. Progress will be monitored by the Children and Young People's Partnership through the corporate parenting committee.

Signed
Cllr– Leader

Signed
Cabinet Member

Signed.....
Director of Children's Services

Statement by the Chair of the Children and Young People's Partnership

The Children and Young People's Partnership is committed to improving outcomes for all children and young people in Dudley and each partner in the Children and Young People's Partnership will contribute to improving outcomes for particularly vulnerable groups and in closing the gap between these groups and the overall population.

Children with disabilities and children who are looked after by the local authority are groups needing particular attention. They often have complex and profound needs and it is evident despite attempts by a range of agencies to meet their needs, outcomes for these two groups are not good enough.

This Corporate Parenting Strategy seeks to narrow the gap between looked after children and all children in Dudley and as the Children and Young People's Partnership we are fully committed to prioritising the needs of looked after children in this borough and to improving services to them.

We recognise that there has been a significant increase in the numbers of children becoming looked after by the Local Authority and we intend to focus our energies on working towards reducing numbers of looked after young people. This will be achieved through effective partnership working in delivering preventative services. In addition, for those young people about to leave care we will prioritise the provision of work placements across the Partnership thereby contributing to the improvement of life chances as they embark on independence.

The Children and Young People's Partnership will continue to focus on developing new ways of working that will improve outcomes for vulnerable children and we are convinced that working together is by far the best way to make a real difference to the lives of children and young people in Dudley.

We know from outcomes of external assessments that services for children in Dudley are universally good, and we also know where we need to make more progress. Talking to children and their families has helped us understand what is important to them and how our services should look. Our vision for the children and young people of Dudley is to be able to support them to:

- ❖ Have the best possible start in life and to be as healthy as possible
- ❖ Feel safe and protected
- ❖ Have the opportunity to fulfil their personal goals and ambitions
- ❖ Be able to take responsibility for playing a full part in the life of their local community
- ❖ To take advantage of high quality learning opportunities, working towards jobs and increased incomes.

We also know that children who are looked after by the local authority are particularly disadvantaged in achieving the above outcomes therefore each partner within the Partnership will focus on developing service provision which will benefit looked after children and young people, and which will redress the disadvantage they currently experience. The Children and Young People's Partnership's shared vision is that our services will help looked after children and young people to achieve their individual potential. Each partner within the Partnership is working towards achieving the best possible services for looked after children, in order that we can all say with pride that "*if these looked after children were our children, then these services would be good enough for them*".

Signed
Director of Children's Services- Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee

INTRODUCTION

Most children live successful and happy lives without the need for external support other than that provided universally, for example, through the range of health services. For some however, targeted and specialist support is required to address particular problems and maintain the family unit. Such support will vary, but whatever form it takes it will be based on a full assessment of the child's needs within the family and will be planned to ensure that agreed outcomes are in the child's best interests and will be met.

There are some children however, for whom such interventions are insufficient to ensure their safety and wellbeing and either at their parent's request, or through legal proceedings, the council must assume parental responsibility for them. These children then become *looked after*¹ and the Local Authority takes on the role of their corporate parent.

HOW WE WILL GIVE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN A VOICE

The key to our strategy is effective consultation with children and young people about the type and range of support and services they need to enable us to meet our corporate parenting responsibilities. Children and young people must be empowered through consistent consultation and responsive complaint mechanisms to actively participate in the many decisions that are made about their lives, and we have a duty to incorporate their views and experience when shaping policy and practice.

Pledge

- Following a consultation with young people we have produced a written pledge which sets out clearly what services and support, children who are looked after can expect from us and our partners.

Children in Care Council

We have established a Children in Care Council which is chaired by young people themselves. It is supported by officers of the Council.

The Children in Care Council is part of the governance arrangements used for the delivery of corporate parenting as the Council will be able to hold Local Authorities to account for the way in which services for looked after children are provided. The Council is in early stages of development. It has already been involved in consultation work in key policies and procedures on the impact on looked after children. We will continue to support young people in their role on the Council.

WHAT ARE OUR ASPIRATIONS?

Children and young people will only achieve their potential through the ambition and high expectations of all those involved in their lives.² When we look after children and young people, we share parental responsibility with their parents and therefore are required to meet the same parental obligations and responsibilities.

¹ In this document children in care are referred to as being looked after.

Children in care include those children in the care of a local authority subject to a Care Order under Sec 31 of the Children Act 1989, and those looked after on a voluntary basis through agreement with their parents under Sec 20 of the Act.

² Care Matters: Time for Change, June 2007 DES

Corporate parenting requires commitment from senior officers and elected members, who have a particular role in ensuring that the life chances and outcomes of children in care are maximised. As corporate parent we must seek exactly the same positive outcomes that every good parent would want for their own children. This duty encompasses education, health and well-being, leisure activities, cultural celebrations, and recognition, praise and encouragement for their achievements. It also extends to the provision of appropriate support when they move into independence from care, when going on to further and higher education and if they wish to remain in placement beyond 18 years of age.

On a day-to-day basis the Social Worker embodies the corporate parenting role and it is recognised that children who are looked after will benefit from having a consistent figure in their lives who can act as advocate, and effectively co-ordinate relevant services to deliver planned outcomes. This requires minimal changes of the key worker role, strengthening of the lead professional role and care planning which takes full account of the wishes of the child.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC APPROACH

Dudley Council will monitor outcomes and improve services for looked after children by focusing on the National Indicators, and commissioning and reviewing services based on five major outcomes.

Health of young people

The key aim is to ensure the life chances of looked after children and care leavers are improved by promoting their health and well being and through seeking to reduce risk taking behaviours.

Corporate parents will:

- Promote the health and well being of looked after children
- Monitor and challenge to improve the performance indicators in relation to health and well being
 - Statutory Health Assessments for looked after children
 - Emotional and behavioural wellbeing of looked after children
 - Promote sex and relationship education of looked after children and care leavers
- Advocate across health agencies on the needs of looked after children and care leavers and ensure all health agencies and partners deliver responsive services
- Seek regular reviews and reports regarding progress in relation to the health of looked after children through the Corporate Parenting Committee
- Take action in conjunction with officers and partner agencies to improve services and respond to changing needs

Safety of young people

The key aim is to safeguard looked after young people and care leavers, and through ensuring the stability of their placements improve their outcomes

Corporate parents will:

- monitor performance indicators on placement stability
 - % of children under 16 yrs who have been looked after for more than 2.5 yrs and have been in the same placement for at least 2 yrs
 - numbers of children with three or more placements
 - number of children at a distance of 20 miles or more from home

- Ensure the safeguarding of children residing in children's residential homes and foster care, by reviewing Regulation 33 and Regulation 42 reports, and reviewing Ofsted regulatory inspection Reports on a regular basis
- Ensure safe recruitment practice for staff and carers that adhere to Safeguarding Guidance and National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes and Fostering
- Ensure all placements for looked after children are of high quality, met diversity needs and are stable

Educational achievement and participation in leisure & creative activities

Our key aim is to ensure that all looked after children will have full time high quality educational provision and that all looked after children and care leavers can access and achieve educational opportunities and enjoy community and leisure activities

Corporate Parents will:

- Monitor key indicators around educational outcomes for looked after children and care leavers including:
 - Attainment at key stage 2 and 4
 - School attendance
 - Exclusions fixed term and permanent
 - Special educational needs
 - School admissions
 - Community and leisure activities
 - The take-up of concessionary leisure passes for foster families and residential homes
- Ensure looked after children and care leavers have access and are prioritised in other key initiatives including extended services, Integrated Youth Support Strategy and Connexions, 14-19 providers and Early Years provision.
- Ensure every looked after child will have an up to date high quality Personal Education Plan (PEPs)

Involvement and consultation with young people

The key aim is to ensure all looked after children and care leavers are consulted and have the opportunity to be actively involved and participate in the planning and development of the services they receive

Corporate parents will:

- Monitor key outcomes for children and care leavers involved in offending behaviour
- receive regular updates on the activities of the CIC
- Liaise regularly with the CIC to deliver on *The pledge* for looked after children through the action plan
- Attend regular meetings and events for looked after children
- Visit children's homes and foster care meetings
- Listen to the voice of care leavers

Being in education, employment and training

The key aim is to ensure that all looked after children receive a broad range of support to enable them to make a positive transition to adulthood and that care leavers have access to support in all aspects of their lives

Corporate parents will:

- Monitor performance indicators relating to care leavers
- Ensure regular contact and communication with leaving care services and post- 16 support services
- Ensure local Councillors advocate and champion the accommodation and leisure needs of care leavers
- Ensure all care leavers access benefits, bursaries and support to Further and Higher Education
- Develop partnerships across agencies who may be required to provide post 16 services
 - Voluntary and community sector
 - Mentoring services
 - Further and Higher Education
 - Health Services
 - Housing
 - Employers
- Advocate for and provide work experience and employment opportunities in Dudley Council and partner agencies
- Promote the needs of care leavers for work experience, training and jobs with employers and employer organisations in the borough.

How we will get there

We will identify our priorities, and the lead officers who have been involved in managing each area of work and reporting on performance will produce collectively an annual report for Looked after Children. The annual report will be reported to the Children's Corporate Parenting Board and the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

The Children in Care Council will be actively engaged in contributing to service improvement and shaping of future services which contribute to improving outcomes for children who are in the care of the Council.