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Forward from Leader and Chief Executive



We are delighted to be asked to provide this forward to the role of the corporate parent in Dudley.

The role of the corporate parent is to seek for the children in public care the outcomes that every good parent would want for their own children.

Once a child is in care all members and officers of the Council, as their corporate parents, need to be concerned about that child as if it were their own.

We are committed to ensuring that we fulfil our duties as corporate parents and that services are provided across the Council to support children in care and ensure that they achieve positive outcomes in respect of their health, education, leisure interests, friendships and future prospects.

This document sets out our commitment to corporate parenting, our ambitions for children in our care and our collective responsibility to working in partnership to achieve our aims.

Signed
Cllr David Caunt – Leader of the Council

Signed
Andrew Sparke – Chief Executive

What is corporate parenting?



Corporate parenting is a concept that refers to the collective responsibility across services and agencies to safeguard and promote the life chances of looked after children.

The role of the corporate parent is to seek for children in care the outcomes that every good parent would want for their own children.

Members and officers of the council are corporate parents to all children in care which means being concerned about their education, health and welfare, how they spend their leisure time and holidays, how they celebrate their culture and how they receive praise and encouragement for their achievements.



The overarching framework of principles is provided by the United National **Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989)** ratified by the British government in 1991.

The Children Act 1989

The Children Act 1989 provides the basic framework for services for children and gives local authorities the legal responsibility for children “in care”.

The Children Act means that all local councillors, when elected, take on this duty of being “corporate parents” towards such children, the key responsibilities of which are:

- Children in public care must be the *primary* focus for the resources and accountability of the local authority which has accepted a parenting responsibility for them;
- Children who have spent a significant time being looked after by the local authority should afterwards be given the kind of support that decent and responsible parents would give to their own children;
- Children in public care and other children in need, including disabled children, should be provided with a fully rounded set of support and care services, in partnership with health and education services particularly. Without such support more children will end up in care.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 requires the local authority which last looked after a young person to draw up a Pathway Plan and provide them with their own adviser, setting out the services needed to help the young person make the transition to adult life. This includes financial and other support for as long as they continue in further or higher education, recognising that parental support does not usually come to an abrupt end at the age of 16.



The Adoption and Children Act 2002

This is a substantially overhauled adoption law in the UK, replacing the 1976 Adoption Act and implementing the proposals from the *Adoption: a new approach* White Paper of 2000. It aligns adoption law with the Children Act to ensure the welfare of the child is paramount and confers new duties on local authorities to provide adoption support services and on the courts to ensure adoption cases progress with appropriate need.

The Government's document, *Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care*, requires a nominated champion for children in care to promote inter-agency working, Personal Education Plans for Children in Care, a designated teacher in each school to promote the interests of children in care and, the expectation of a time limit of 20 school days within which children in care who change school must be found an education placement.

The Government has produced comprehensive *Guidance on Promoting the Health of Looked After Children*, which places a duty on local authorities, Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities to ensure every child entering care has a health assessment and that a health plan is then drawn up and regularly reviewed for each child in care.

The Children Act 2004

The Children Act 2004 received royal assent on 15th November. The new legislation is accompanied by the launch of a major strategy document for English authorities, *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*, which is intended to set the direction for the major programme of change in the delivery of children's services.

The Children Act 2004 is the legislative framework for developing effective and accessible services focused on the need of children, young people and their families and for taking forward work on children's trusts. Section 7 of the Act places a new duty on the statutory agencies that provide services for children and young people to co-ordinate with arrangements to improve the well-being of the children in the local authority's area. Outcomes for children and young people are more likely to improve if all agencies work together to put children and young people at the heart of integrated service delivery.



What Looked After Children in Dudley should expect from us:

We want you to:

- have a good quality education;
- be involved in hobbies and leisure activities;
- be able to make relationships with people and feel good about yourself, your culture and background;
- be as healthy and well as possible;
- be able to speak up for yourself and say what you want and need;
- be able to take up further education, employment and training once you have left school;
- be able to live with others or independently;
- have the skills to live independently ;
- live in a safe place where you are protected from harm.

In order for this to be possible we will:

- ensure you have regular dental checks and your health needs are met;
- ensure you have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) that identifies what you need in order to achieve at school;
- provide you with a Key to Leisure pass;
- provide you with a placement;
- provide you with a social worker;
- when you reach 16 provide you with a service from the 16+ Team
- provide you with a school place;
- provide you with the services of the Children's Rights and Advocacy Project, to ensure you know how to complain or comment about the services you receive;
- make sure you understand why you are in care, what is in your care plan and involve you in decisions about your future;
- provide you with a copy of your care plan;
- give you the opportunity to use our interactive software, Viewpoint, so that you can contribute to your review;



Councillors corporate parenting responsibilities

- provide you with resources and to support your education, employment and training;
- provide work experience opportunities within Dudley Council;
- provide support if you return to live with your family.

The most important role that councillors can play is to be a champion for children and think of children in care as “my children”.

That will require you to help ensure that looked after children have the same care and life chances as other children in the community and to ask yourself “would this be OK if it were my child?” As the Council as a whole is the “corporate parent” all councillors have a basic level of responsibility for children in Dudley:

- to ensure that the services being provided to children and their families are of the highest quality;
- to ensure that the voice and views of the child are heard both in decision making about their lives and in contributing to the way in which services are developed;
- to be aware of the needs of looked after children and have ambitions for them as though they were your own;
- to achieve standards of protection for looked after children which are as high as can be expected from parents;
- to apply the values and principles of good parenting through promoting an awareness of a child’s perspective and never losing sight within the “big picture” of the small actions that make a real difference to children’s daily lives and future well-being;
- to ensure that looked after children are the primary focus for the resources and accountability of the local authority;
- to ensure that looked after children who have spent a significant amount of time being looked after by the authority, once they are no longer looked after, are given the kind of support that decent and responsible parents would give to their own children;
- to ensure that children in care are provided with comprehensive packages of support and care services in partnership with health and education in particular.



These are some key questions that all councillors should seek information about to enable them to fulfil the corporate parenting role effectively:

1. How many children in need; children whose names are on the child Protection register; how many looked after children and care leavers are there in my area? How old are they and what sort of help to they need?
2. In particular, how many are from ethnic minorities and how many are disabled?
3. Are your looked after children safe?
4. How well does the authority look after them?
5. Are they all in school or is there alternative education provision? How well are they doing at school, college or university and what needs to be done to improve educational outcomes?
6. What are their health needs?
7. What are their housing needs?
8. What specific support is there when they leave our care?
9. What is happening to make sure they don't get into trouble?

The Children's Champion Group in Dudley, which was established in 2000, is chaired by the designated Children's Champion and involves officers, young people and Black Country Children's Rights.

The purpose of the group and its key responsibilities are:

Purpose

- ensure that children looked after by Dudley Social Services get a good deal – as good as any other child in the community
- value diversity and ensure that service provision by the Directorate respects different cultures and needs
- ensure that young people and children achieve their best and that these achievements are recognised
- promote understanding in the community in order to get more support for looked after children and children in need
- actively involve young people in participating in the group

Key Responsibilities

- take an active interest in improving how to improve child protection policy and practice in order to safeguard children of Dudley from abuse
- review Council targets and achievements in relation to the outcomes for all looked after children
- ensure that Dudley Social Services has effective arrangements for listening to looked after children and their parents
- promote children's issues within the Dudley Council, Primary Care Trust, voluntary and other statutory sectors
- establish strong links with other Agencies within the community concerned with children's issues
- receive agendas and minutes from the Corporate Parenting Champions Group and contribute to it
- ensure that the group is consulted by the Council and other organisations on issues relating to looked after children and children in need
- campaign for better family support in the community to make sure that fewer children need to be looked after in the future
- give representation or support for children looked after or children in need when required to do so.

Role of Corporate Parenting Group



To champion the needs of children in the care of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Purpose of the group

- to bring together officers from each Directorate within the Council to raise awareness of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities for children
- to develop, monitor and review a corporate parenting policy which protects and safeguards children in the care of Dudley Council, promotes their welfare and enhances their life chances
- to identify and implement specific opportunities for each Directorate to pursue which build on the particular strengths and expertise it has to offer
- to work corporately on joint initiatives which raise aspirations for children in the care of Dudley Council and maximise opportunities for access and inclusion in services provided by the Council
- to review and discuss new national and local policies and initiatives which may have implications for all Directorates

Membership

Assistant Director, Children & Families Division – Directorate of Social Services chair
Assistant Director, Access and Inclusion, Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning
Head of Service, Directorate of Social Services / Corporate Parenting Lead
Chief Executive's representative
Legal and Property representative
Urban Environment representative
Finance representative
Housing representative
Young Person / Advocate as appropriate

If the nominated member is unable to attend a deputy should be identified

Meetings

Every two months in the first instance. Quarterly once the group is established

Reporting arrangements

Representatives will report back to the chief officer. The group as a whole will report back to Corporate Board

Social Services

Strategic Aim

To promote the needs of looked after children, to ensure that they access opportunities and resources which will enable them to meet their full potential in respect of education, health and social attainment. Children who are looked after should be provided with the security of consistent and responsible parenting which nurtures, protects and provides positive outcomes.

Strategic Objective

To provide a range of integrated services for looked after children which recognise the accountability of the local authority as the corporate parent and which are flexible enough to meet individual need.

To work in partnership with all Council directorates and agencies which have a statutory role in promoting the needs of children and those in the voluntary and private sector from whom social services may commission services which will enhance the well-being of looked after children.

Sub Objective: To ensure that children looked after gain maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care.

To bring the overall performance of children looked after for a year or more (in National Curriculum tests) closer into line with local children generally.

To ensure that children looked after enjoy a standard of health and development as good as all children of the same age living in the same area.

To reduce the rate of offending of children looked after.

To ensure that children looked after from black and ethnic minority groups gain maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care.

Sub Objective: To ensure that young people leaving care, as they enter adulthood, are not isolated and participate socially and economically as citizens.

For young people who were looked after at the age of 16 to maximise the number engaged in education, training or employment at the age of 19.



To maximise the number of young people leaving care after their sixteenth birthday who are still in touch with Social Services, or a known and approved contact, on their 19th birthday.

To maximise the number of young people leaving care on or after their 16th birthday who have suitable accommodation at the age of 19.

Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning corporate parenting responsibilities

Strategic Aim

To ensure that looked after children in Dudley Council are able to access their full entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum wherever possible within their local school.

To ensure that looked after children in are given every opportunity to achieve success so that they can achieve their full potential and prepare for an active role in adult life as a member of the local community.

Objectives

To work and collaborate with other agencies to ensure that every child in public care has a Personal Education Plan which highlights their individual needs and the ways in which we can work together to fulfil those needs.

To ensure that each young person has access to a full and broad balanced curriculum preferably in their local school and that they have appropriate opportunities within that school to fulfil their academic potential.

To provide opportunities for looked after children to participate fully in the extra curricular and social aspects of their community and school.

To maximise life for looked after children through positive educational experience, particularly ensuring good attendance, high quality health care and the provision of high quality education.

To minimise the number of children in public care who are permanently and fixed term excluded from school.



To closely monitor the attendance of children in public care and reduce truancy rates.

To raise the achievements of children in public care and celebrate their success.

To encourage looked after children to continue education and training beyond their statutory school age.

Chief Executive's corporate parenting

Strategic Aim

In the role as a corporate parent in the Chief Executive's Personnel and Training Section will offer practical help in seeking and choosing jobs and careers for children looked after by the Local Authority.

Objectives

To offer advice, training placements and full time positions on our modern apprenticeship programmes.

Finance Directorate corporate parenting responsibilities

Strategic Aim

To provide the Council, in its role of corporate parent, with a high quality range of support services to enable it to discharge its duties effectively.

Objectives

To provide a range of support services to all front line services delivering the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities.

- Support will include financial advice, ICT Services, Payroll, Audit and Purchasing. To ensure looked after children, or those leaving care, receive any benefits to which they are entitled, recognising the link between poverty reduction (Richer Borough under the Council Plan) and Good Health.



- Support can include direct benefits such as free school meals assessments for school children; payment of benefits due such as housing benefit, council tax benefit or rent allowance for those children leaving care; provision of welfare benefits advice and entitlement to council tax discounts where eligible.

To maintain a departmental knowledge and awareness of corporate parenting through representation on the Corporate Parenting Champions Group.

Housing Directorate corporate parenting responsibilities

Strategic Aim

To provide the Council in its role of corporate parent with a high quality range of housing advice and assistance to enable the Council to discharge its duties effectively. This will include in particular, close working with the Directorate of Social Services to ensure that the current homelessness and Children Act legislation is adhered to and jointly implemented.

Objectives

To provide a range of housing advice and assistance services for both the public and private sector to assist the Council to discharge its corporate responsibilities.

To ensure looked after children or those leaving care are given appropriate and timely housing advice and assistance and work with the Social Services Directorate and other agencies to ensure that accommodation is made available for this group.

To maintain and disseminate knowledge and awareness of the Corporate Parenting Group through representation on the Corporate Parenting Champions Group.

Sports and Recreation corporate parenting responsibilities

Strategic Aim

To provide the Council in its role as corporate parent with a high quality range of advice on sport and recreation opportunities for looked after children and those leaving care.



Objectives

To ensure looked after children and those leaving care are given opportunities to participate in sport and recreation across the borough.

To promote the advantages of the new Options+ card for all looked after children, foster families and those leaving care.

To maintain representation on the Looked After Children Leisure Opportunities working group.

To maintain representation for the 16+ Team group.

To maintain and improve knowledge and awareness of corporate parenting through representation on the Corporate Parenting Champions Group

Law and Property corporate parenting responsibilities

Strategic Aim

To provide the Council in its role as corporate parent with a high quality range of legal advice, assistance and representation to enable the Council to discharge its duties effectively. This will primarily include advice and representation in respect of all areas of child protection and adoption.

Objectives

To safeguard the integrity of the Council, as corporate parent, and ensure that the paramount consideration remains the welfare of children within its care and responsibility.



Legal Framework

The local authority has a duty to act as a responsible parent, on a corporate basis, for young people that are looked after. This includes:

- duty to prepare young people to live independently once they cease to be looked after, if they have attained the age of 16 when they cease to be looked after;
- duty to advise, assist and befriend them up to the age of 21 (and in some cases up to age 24).

These duties and principles are now enshrined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 amends the leaving care provisions contained in Section 24 of The Children Act 1989. The Children Act 1989 and its underlying principles provide the overall legal framework.

The main purpose is to improve the life chances of young people living in and leaving local authority care. Its main aims are:

- to delay young people's discharge from care until they are prepared and ready to leave;
- to improve the assessment, preparation and planning for leaving care;
- to provide better personal support for young people after leaving care;
- to improve the financial arrangements for care leavers.

Care Leavers

Those affected by the Act fall into 4 distinctive groups:

- *Eligible children* – Children aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who are still looked after;
- *Relevant children* – Children aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and have been looked after at some time while 16 or 17 and who have left care;



- *Former relevant children* – Young people aged 18 to 21 who have been either eligible or relevant children, or both. If at the age of 21 the responsible authority with education or training is still helping the young person, he or she remains a former relevant child to the end of the agreed programme of education or training even if that takes him or her past the age of 21;
- *Qualifying young children and young people over 16* – Any young person under the age of 21 (under 24 if in education or training) who ceases to be looked after or accommodated after the age of 16 but do not qualify as eligible children.

Practice

Local authorities have a duty to prepare a care plan for each child they are looking after (the Arrangements for Placement of Children's Regulations 1991) and are also required to have regard to whether arrangements need to be made for the time when the child will no longer be looked after (Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991).

In keeping with the recommendations of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 the Council will make provision and periodic review of an after care plan for every young person who is looked after on their 16th birthday. This will be known as a "Pathway Plan".

The Pathway Plan will be based on a thorough assessment of need on a multi-agency basis between social services, housing, health, Connexions, education and others, as appropriate, in collaboration with the young person. The Council's Leaving Care forum will provide a real and cohesive link for the Council to promote these ends. With this medium together with the Children's Rights Service and other feedback, user consultation shall advise this service and is central to this process. The Pathway Plan will be reviewed at least on a 6 monthly basis.

The local authority shall carry out all assessments of every child leaving the looked after system who has attained the age of 16, with a view to determining what advice, assistance and support it would be appropriate for them to be provided with. All such young people shall have a "Pathway Plan".

Education, training and employment

The Council will ensure that they engage fully with local education authorities, schools, the careers, employment and Connexions services in the after care planning process



and that these agencies are regarded as integral partners in the assessment of the needs of care leavers.

The Council will make every effort to provide accommodation for those care leavers in higher education who are eligible for assistance under the Children (Leaving Care) Act and who would otherwise be homeless during vacations.

Accommodation

Those young people affected by the Act have an absolute right to accommodation. Young people will be made aware of the range of accommodation available to them and the support they can receive. The Council will continue to develop housing options with a range of providers in order to offer young people as wide a choice of accommodation as possible.

Specialist team

The Social Services Directorate have a Leaving Care Team that has been developed to meet the requirements of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The Council will continue to develop the work of the Leaving Care Team. This team liaises with the wider range of other agencies involved in assessment and planning. They identify and organise the contribution of others whilst supporting existing relationships between carers and the young person.

Befriending and mentoring

Young people will be supported and encouraged to build and maintain links within their families and the local community in order to sustain them as they become more independent. Services will be provided to support existing relationships as well as develop new ones. The experiences of other young people who have been looked after will be utilised and contact with individual and collective care leavers will be encouraged as an additional means of support. The local authority will arrange for each young person for whom they have responsibility under the Children (Leaving Care) Act to have a Young Persons Advisor.

Flexibility of options and decision making

Services to young people will be planned and delivered in a way that is both flexible and sensitive to their needs. It will be acknowledged that some young people may need to



try different living situations and receive services at different times. Services will have an “open door” approach to young people who qualify for a service, even where they may not have required a service earlier. This may at times include direct financial support.

Financial assistance

Under the new arrangements local authorities will have the primary income maintenance rate for both eligible and relevant children. Young people will be helped to understand their full entitlements and to play a full and productive part in society.

Health and personal development

Young people will be assisted to have access to advice on health and related services in order to promote their quality of life, enabling them to follow a healthy lifestyle. This will include advice about budgeting and diet and developing leisure pursuits in the community. Advice and support will be given to help make and sustain positive personal relationships and to access appropriate systems as necessary.

Equality

Services to young people who cease to be looked after will seek at all times to follow council policies relating to anti-discriminatory practice and equal opportunities. Services will be sensitive to the needs of young people arising from their gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, religion, disability, and where appropriate, their status as a parent.



Policy Statement

Looked after children and young people are more likely than other children to experience exclusion, irregular schooling and low levels of attainment and achievement. They are therefore likely to be at risk educationally. Dudley MBC is committed to working corporately and with other partner agencies to improve the life chances of this group of children, and to ensure that they derive the maximum benefit from their educational opportunities.

Children and young people in public care are a particularly vulnerable group due to the experiences that have led them to become looked after. Directorates will work corporately and actively through careful assessment, planning processes and the provision of services to minimize the effects of becoming and remaining looked after.

Joint Aims of the Directorate of Social Services and the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning

- Children and young people in public care are entitled to education, care and support which prepares them for adulthood and citizenship. We will ensure that children in public care have opportunities to achieve success by offering positive alternatives to the disruption and damaging personal histories which many will have experienced.
- Education matters to all children and young people including those in public care. The education of children and young people in public care will be prioritised, valued and supported by all staff and carers.
- Children and young people in public care will have equal access to educational provision and opportunities and their individual needs will be met sensitively and promptly in a way that takes account of disability, culture, religion, gender, language and race.
- Continuity and stability are key to ensuring good educational attainment and outcomes. Children's schooling will be seen as a central part of care planning. Continuity of education will be prioritised, and whenever possible provided on a full-time basis in a mainstream school.
- Children's own families will be supported in maintaining continued involvement in the progress and achievements of their child. *(Unless there are particular circumstances which do not allow this).*



- High educational expectation and aspirations will be held for children and young people in public care by all those in day to day contact with them and by those involved in planning and allocating resources.
- Early intervention that avoids delay and timely positive action will be a shared objective of those involved in the education of children and young people in public care.
- Children and young people in public care will be listened to with regard to their views and ideas about their education and involved in formulating plans and actions.
- Appropriate and regular training, including joint training, will be provided to ensure that staff and carers are able to work effectively with children and young people with regard to promoting and supporting their education.
- Children and young people in public care approaching school leaving age will receive educational experiences, advice and support appropriate to their needs. Links with Connexions will be positively promoted as a key part of this.
- Where children and young people need to be placed out of Borough, the same standards of care and education will be applied to these placements and both Directorates will collaborate in the interest of these children.

To meet these aims both Directorates will work in partnership to:

- Make the education of children and young people in public care a priority and identify key staff to take strategic and operational responsibility for doing this;
- Make formal liaison arrangements to jointly consider issues of policy, procedures and practice, and keep these under regular review. This will include the establishment of formal protocols and joint working and planning arrangements that will secure positive educational outcomes for children in public care;
- Ensure that an appropriate full-time educational provision is identified for all children in public care, together with the timescales in which this will be secured, in line with and supported by the School Admissions Policy and the Pupil Placement Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).



- Ensure that the progress of individual children who are in public care is monitored by senior officers and Lead Members in both Directorates on a regular basis;
- Work together and in partnership with schools to develop and co-ordinate services, systems and support structures that will assist in meeting the targets for children in public care;
- Raise awareness, accord priority and focus action across both Directorates so that the achievements of children and young people in public care are promoted and recognised;
- Recognise and celebrate the educational achievements of children and young people in public care by holding an annual award ceremony;
- Provide and develop performance and management information systems so that relevant information can be recorded, shared, used and monitored, through close liaison between information management staff in both Directorates;
- Maintain an up to date list of designated teachers centrally, and ensure that they are supported to carry out their role, as part of developing effective partnerships with schools;

Continue to develop Personal Educational Plans for children in public care, to meet the individual needs of children. This will include ensuring that educational needs, attainments and Personal Education Plans are included in reviews and Care Plans of children in public care are seen as a priority.

Joint Policy Statement Principles

- that all looked after children should have the opportunity to enjoy a standard of health care as good as all children of the same age living in the Dudley Borough
- services will be co-ordinated and managed at a strategic level and will be holistic and sensitive to individual need
- high expectations and aspirations will be maintained for children in the public care in relation to their health care needs
- the focus of health care planning will include health promotion, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and sexual health as well as meeting physical health needs
- Dudley South PCT, Dudley Beacon and Castle PCT and the Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust is committed to assisting Dudley Council in exercising the corporate parenting role in relation to looked after children
- services will be non-discriminatory and will promote equality of access and anti-racist practice. They will be delivered in a sensitive, age appropriate way which recognises the importance of choice and accessibility
- services will be delivered in a way that enables and empowers the child or young person to take appropriate responsibility for their own health
- we recognise that children in public care may need higher levels of parenting and health input in order to achieve the same health outcomes as other children in the population
- in order to ensure a good standard of health care it is essential that adequate information about children's health is obtained at the point of entry to the looked after system and that this is followed up with more detailed comprehensive family and child health history and background
- it is recognised that there are certain groups of children who have specific needs that will require additional services in order to ensure that their health needs are met effectively



Responsibilities

- will appoint a designated doctor and a designated nurse for looked after children to ensure that health assessments take place within a time scale that will not be detrimental to the health of looked after children
- will ensure access to appropriate health services
- will ensure that health information is shared with social services
- will make formal liaison arrangements with social services and participate in the review and development of policies and procedures relating to the health needs of looked after children
- will raise awareness, accord priority to and focus in their services in the interests of looked after children within the requirements of the National Service for Children (NSF)