

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING POLICY and STRATEGY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Corporate Parenting describes the collective responsibilities that members and officers of Brighton & Hove City Council and its partner organisations have towards children and young people in the care of the Local Authority. These include children accommodated by voluntary agreement with their parent/s, those on statutory orders, those in shared care arrangements, those remanded into care and unaccompanied asylum seeking children. These duties extend to those young people who have left care at 18 years up to the age of 21 (or 24 if remaining in higher education).
- 1.2 The children and young people for whom we are responsible as corporate parents are talented, resourceful, articulate, have huge potential and many will lead successful adult lives. However, as a result of their early life experiences, they are often less successful in attaining their full potential and this contributes to them being over-represented amongst:

- Adults with no formal educational qualifications
- People who are homeless
- The prison population
- Unemployed people
- Adults using mental health services
- Teenage parents
- Those involved in anti-social behaviour
- Those who are not, on leaving school engaged in employment, education or training.

Research from Professor Mike Stein and his team from York University undertaken between 1984 – 2009 shows that from poor starting points, children and young people in care fall into three distinct categories:

- The ‘Movers’ – these are the young people who will successfully move on from a stable care experience with relatively low level but consistent support
- The ‘Survivors’ - these are the young people who will do well in adult life with skilled, intensive support
- The ‘Strugglers’- these are the vulnerable minority of young people who will continue to need targeted support well into adulthood

It is useful to be mindful of these three distinct groups when commissioning and monitoring services to children in care and care leavers.

- 1.3 Effective corporate parenting needs a commitment from all council employees

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and elected members, in a council-wide approach. Corporate parenting involves the whole council and its partners acting as a good parent, committing resources and working together to improve the lives of all children and young people in care and care leavers. It is about prioritising their needs, caring about what they want to and supporting them to make the most of their lives.

As corporate parents, members, officers and partners need to ask two questions:

“If this was my child, would this be good enough for them?”

“If I was that child or young person, would this have been good enough for me?”

(DfES 2003 “If it were my child .A councillor’s guide to being a good corporate parent.”)

- 1.4 The purpose of this strategy is to outline a Council-wide vision of our role as corporate parents and to ensure that we are all working together to achieve common goals and ambitions for our children and young people in care and care leavers.

The Children and Families Delivery Unit is collectively accountable for Corporate Parenting duties but responsibility extends beyond it to include:

- All Brighton & Hove City Council services such as Housing, Culture & Enterprise and Environment and partner agencies
- The Surrey and Sussex Strategic Health Authority and Brighton and Hove City Primary Care Trust who should actively promote the health of Children in Care
- The Community Safety and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships will need to consider whether Children in Care are being supported in avoiding offending behaviour
- Sussex Police
- Sussex Probation Service
- Governing bodies of maintained schools and Further Education colleges
- Voluntary, community and independent organisations

- 1.5 The Corporate Parenting Strategy builds on earlier work and intends to re-invigorate the way Brighton & Hove City Council meets the needs of its children and young people in care and care leavers. The commissioning and delivery of services for these groups of children and young people is underpinned by the Every Child Matters initiative and Children Act 2004 and more recently by the Care Matters Implementation plan 2008 and the Children and Young Person Act 2008.

- 1.6 Responsibility and accountability for the well-being and future prospects for children and young people in Brighton & Hove’s care and its care leavers rests with their corporate parents. A good corporate parent must offer everything that a good parent would offer and improving the role of the corporate parent is key to improving their children’s outcomes. This

improvement relies on addressing both the difficulties which children and young people in care experience and the challenges of parenting within a complex system of different services. Equally it is important that the children and young people themselves have the opportunity to shape and influence the parenting they receive.

- 1.7 The concept of corporate parenting is inherently paradoxical. Good parenting demands continuity and organisations by their nature are continuously changing. Officers and elected members move on, and structures, procedures and partnerships are modified, refined and transformed. One challenge of being a good corporate parent is to manage these changes while giving each individual child and young person a sense of stability.

2. Our Vision, Key Principles and Underlying Values

- 2.1 The Brighton & Hove vision will mirror that of “Care Matters: Time to deliver for children in care” DCSF 2008:

“Our aspirations for children being cared for reflect those aspirations we would have for them as if they were our own. We know that children in care are often in much greater need than other children and we must ensure they obtain all the help they require. We aim to create a home and community environment that provides every child with a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to fulfil their full potential”

- 2.2 Our vision and priorities for children and young people in care and care leavers are based around the five national outcomes of Every Child Matters and drive our Corporate Parenting Strategy. These five outcomes are universal ambitions for every child and young person whatever their background or circumstances. They build upon the broad vision detailed in the Children & Young People’s Plan 2009-12 that has been agreed with partners and with children and young people themselves through their consultative forums. This vision is that:

“Brighton & Hove should be the best place in the country for children and young people to grow up. We want to ensure all children and young people have the best possible start in life, so that everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential, what ever that may be”

- 2.3 “A key commitment of Care Matters was to put the voice of the child in care at the heart of the care system. All parents take children’s wishes and feelings into account when making day to day decisions about their lives and corporate parents need to do so too. Research also shows that when children are involved in the development and operation of services, provision is more likely to be what children want and need, leading to more placement stability and better outcomes for children”
Care Matters Ministerial Stocktake Report 2009

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2.4 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child became international law in 1990. It provides an internationally agreed framework of minimum standards necessary for the well being of all children and young people. These principles need to apply to children in care and care leavers but will also need to be championed by their Corporate Parent.

3. Aims and Objectives of the Strategy

3.1 Corporate Parenting operates at strategic, operational and individual levels and the 3 key elements are:

- A statutory duty detailed in the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 on all parts of a local authority to co-operate in promoting the welfare of looked after children and young people and a duty on other partners and agencies to co-operate in fulfilling that duty
- Co-ordinating the activities of the many different professionals and carers who are involved in a child or young person's life and taking a strategic, child-centred approach to the delivery of services
- Shifting the emphasis from 'corporate' to 'parenting' which means doing what a good parent would do to promote and support the physical, emotional, social and cognitive development of a child from infancy to adulthood

3.2 The specific objective of this Strategy is to ensure the Corporate Parenting responsibilities for all elected members and council employees are clearly outlined in order that:

- Elected members have a clear understanding and awareness of the needs of Brighton & Hove's Children in Care and care leavers and ensure their responsibilities as corporate parents are reflected in all aspects of the Council's work;
- All services improve their ability to deliver to the Corporate Parenting agenda, and have mechanisms in place to continually monitor and review the means by which their services contribute to positive outcomes for Children in Care and care leavers.
- The corporate parenting commitment leads to measurable improvement in the life chances of Children in Care and care leavers, enabling them to succeed in line with their peers.
- Communication between elected members and Children in Care and care leavers enables participation and inclusion, ensuring children and young people have a say in how decisions are made about services affecting them and are able to influence those decisions.
- Partnership working and joint planning and commissioning is promoted as a pre-requisite to delivering effective services to Children in Care and care leavers.
- Effective monitoring and accountability of corporate parenting duties is in place.

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3.3 Responsibilities as corporate parents require everyone working with or on behalf of our children and young people in care and care leavers to ensure that the five Every Child Matters outcomes are addressed either directly and indirectly.

3.3.1 **Being Healthy**

While promoting physical and sexual health and emotional well-being are obvious priorities, preventative strategies including education to encourage healthy lifestyle choices and leisure interests are key elements of our work. Children and young people in care may have additional health needs caused by earlier abuse or neglect and these must be taken into account under the key aim of ensuring their life chances are improved by promoting their health and well being.

To ensure the life chances of children and young people in care and care leavers are improved by promoting of health and well being, corporate parents will:

- Promote their health and well being and leisure activities
- Ensure every child and young person is registered with a GP and dentist and optician (if appropriate)
- Monitor and challenge to improve performance in relation to health and well being eg Statutory Health Assessments, emotional and behavioural well being, Sex and Relationship Education
- Ensure a dedicated access pathway for mental health, substance misuse and teenage parent services
- Advocate across health agencies on the needs of children and young people in care and care leavers and ensure all health agencies and partners understand and deliver services promptly and effectively
- Encourage and support all children and young people to access leisure, play, sports, educational and cultural activities

3.3.2 **Staying Safe**

Most children and young people who come into care do so as a result of not being safe from physical and sexual harm and neglect while living at home. Robust arrangements need to be in place therefore to ensure that they live in safe, secure and nurturing placements that provide continuity and stability. As they move towards adulthood we must ensure that they have access to safe, secure and affordable permanent accommodation.

To ensure the life chances of children and young people in care and care leavers are improved by ensuring they live in safe, stable homes that provide stability, corporate parents will:

- Ensure a Care Plan is in place for every child and young person that is regularly reviewed by their Independent Reviewing Officer

- Monitor performance on placement stability and distance placed from home
- Monitor the quality of care of in-house foster care and agency foster and residential homes providers and how they meet diversity needs
- Ensure that 'unregulated' placements are governed by robust service level agreements
- Ensure robust arrangements are in place for children and young people who are missing from care
- Ensure formal arrangements are in place to meet the housing and support needs of care leavers

3.3.3 **Enjoying and Achieving**

The main focus is on improving the educational attainment of children and young people in care. This is the single most important contribution those involved in corporate parenting can make because it is about investing in their future. It must be acknowledged that children and young people in care have significantly poorer educational outcomes than their peers. However, we must move away from the assumption that this is an inevitable consequence of their often disadvantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. What it does mean is that we need to invest in specific and targeted additional support to improve these outcomes.

To enable children and young people in care and care leavers to access and achieve educational opportunities, corporate parents will:

- Monitor performance of educational attainment at Key Stages 2, 4 and 5 to the completion of university education and completion of Personal Education Plans
- Monitor School Attendance, Exclusions (fixed term and permanent) Special Educational Needs and admissions
- Ensure that Designated Teachers are established in all schools
- Ensure pathways are in place to key initiatives such as early years and extended services, out of school activities, Integrated Youth Support and 14-19 providers
- Ensure appropriate support is in place to ensure smooth transition to Further and Higher Education

3.3.4 **Making a Positive Contribution**

Participation and engagement of children and young people in care is key to the success of any corporate parenting strategy. This outcome area is about more than just involving them in the development of services. We must support them to: engage in law abiding and socially acceptable activity and

behaviour; develop positive relationships by choosing not to bully or discriminate; develop self-confidence and learning to deal successfully with significant life changes and challenges.

The key aim is to ensure that all children and young people in care have the opportunity to be listened to and heard, are involved and participate in the planning and development of services they receive.

To ensure all children and young people in care and care leavers have the opportunity to be listened to and heard and are involved and participate in the planning and development of services they receive, corporate parents will:

- Monitor the participation of children and young people in their statutory reviews
- Encourage the development of the Listen Up Care Council and 16 Plus Advisory Board
- Ensure that the views and opinions of children and young people are gathered and that it can be evidenced that these have an impact on and influence the development of service delivery
- Ensure that children and young people know how to make a complaint and are able to easily access an Advocate
- Ensure that the promises in the Pledge are delivered

3.3.5 Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Children and young people in care find it more difficult than their peers to attain a good standard of living when they become adult and independent. We must promote and provide work experience, taster days, training and employment opportunities with all employers and employer organisations in the city and to continue to ensure that these care leavers are fully supported to move positively into adulthood.

To ensure all children and young people in care and care leavers receive appropriate support to be able to move positively into adulthood, corporate parents will:

- Monitor the performance of education, employment and training status and suitability of housing of 19 year old care leavers
- Develop partnerships to improve access to and support in Further and Higher Education
- Advocate for and provide work experience and employment opportunities within Brighton & Hove City Council and its partner agencies
- Promote the needs of care leavers for work experience, training and job opportunities with employers and employer organisations in the city
- Ensure that care leavers have access to safe, secure and affordable accommodation

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4. **Getting it Right – How we will take the Strategy forward**

4.1 Responsibility for ensuring that the Corporate Parenting Strategy will be implemented and be effective in its aims and objectives has six key elements:

The role of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and the Head of Children and Families who will provide leadership across the authority in safeguarding and in monitoring the welfare of children in care and care leavers

The role of the Corporate Parenting Panel in terms of accountability and governance. The Panel consists of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, elected members from the Conservative, Labour and Green groups, the Head of Children and Families, children and young people representatives, Service Manager, Children in Care & Young People's Services, representatives of Brighton & Hove Foster Carers Association, and Officers from Health, Housing, Environment, Culture on a need to attend basis.

The Panel acts as the advisory consultation body to the council to enable the effective discharge of the duty of corporate parent. The role of the Panel is to monitor and review services and establish the objectives and priorities for looked after children by council departments and partner agencies. The central role is to achieve continuing improvements for looked after children and care leavers. The Panel will oversee the implementation of the strategy.

Children & Young People's Participation ie the Listen Up Care Council for children in care up to age of 16 and the 16 Plus Advisory Board for young people in care and care leavers aged 16-21 years. These groups will develop mechanisms by which views and opinions from a wide range of children and young people can be gathered. The Corporate Parenting Panel has agreed that elected members would meet with these participation groups at regular intervals throughout the year.

The Brighton & Hove Pledge This set of promises that set out the support and care we will provide to children and young people in care has been hand delivered to all Brighton & Hove children in care and care leavers with an accompanying letter from 'Clive' and 'Stacey' from the participation groups. It has also been distributed to all Brighton & Hove foster carers, independent fostering agencies and residential children's homes providers, partner statutory agencies and voluntary sector partners. Social work staff have also been briefed on its purpose and how we must be held accountable to the promises we have given. The Pledge was communicated to a wider audience in Brighton & Hove as it was featured in a special Corporate Parenting edition of 'Children First' magazine in July 2010.

The Corporate Parenting Working Group and Report Card The working group, chaired by the Service Manager Children in Care & Young People's Services consists of senior managers from Children & Families operational teams, Fostering & Adoption Team, Agency Placements Team, Youth Offending Service, Virtual School for Children in Care, Nurse Consultant for Children in Care, Independent Reviewing Officer and Performance Management Team representatives.

In developing the new strategy a comprehensive audit and self assessment has been undertaken using the Ofsted Framework for Inspection. This has been benchmarked against inspections that have taken place in other local authorities under the new framework and has highlighted very good and outstanding areas of practice as well as identifying areas for development and will help shape and strengthen the next phase of the strategy.

The group has also examined management information from the Performance Team which evidences how Brighton & Hove is performing against its local authority statistical neighbours as well as all authorities in England on the National Indicators for outcomes for children in care and care leavers., Actions to improve performance, summaries of initiatives eg participation.

The Report Card is not intended just to be a technical document to be used strategically. It is designed so as to be accessible to all corporate parents and any professionals from other organisations and services that have, or potentially have a role in supporting our children and promoting their life chances. Everyone who receives this report will have the opportunity to feed back on how to improve outcomes for our children.

Council-wide responsibilities. The offers made by the corporate parenting champions of Brighton & Hove Council will be followed up by the designated leads as detailed.

4.2 **Shared Responsibilities**

Responsibilities for ensuring improved outcomes for children in care and care leavers are wide ranging amongst elected members, officers and carers.

Elected members council-wide have to ensure that public services used or needed by children in care are of a high quality, integrated and take account of their needs. They will ensure that they are fully informed of the issues facing children in care by understanding the characteristics of children in care and by knowing how well services are performing in meeting their assessed needs. This requires an awareness and understanding of the:

- Care and placement arrangements
- Child protection and safety policies and procedures
- Education performance and achievements
- Responsiveness of health services
- Preparation for leaving care arrangements and housing needs

- Arrangements to prevent children in care from getting into trouble.

Elected members will be supported in meeting their responsibilities by Brighton & Hove officers. They will provide leadership that will encourage and support partnership and joined-up working. This will ensure that funding, commissioning and priority setting deliver the best combination of services for children and young people in care and care leavers.

Foster Carers will be assessed, approved, supervised and supported in the following:

- Providing a safe and comfortable home for children and young people in their care
- Giving children and young people time and attention and clear boundaries
- Providing encouragement and motivation to help the child or young person meet their potential
- Working positively with birth parents and other family members.
- Working as part of a team with others who share responsibility for the child or young person's care, welfare and development
- Providing care that support and promotes the child or young person's culture, race, religion, language, disability and sexual orientation.

Social Workers and other social work staff have responsibilities in the following areas:

- Ensuring that the child and young person's needs are properly assessed and that these are properly represented in their Care or Pathway Plans.
- Having the key role in setting and establishing plans for children and young people in care and care leavers. First consideration will be given to returning the child or young person to their parent's care where this is safe to do so, or other family members. Where this is not achievable efforts will be made to secure the child's placement within an alternative family setting such as adoption or foster care. Where a child or young person remains in care, plans will also address leaving care arrangements.
- In care planning social work staff will listen to the views and wishes of the child or young person and those of their family members. The views of others engaged in providing services to children in care will also be sought.
- Ensuring the child or young person is healthy and their health needs are appropriately assessed and met.
- Ensuring the child or young person is safely and securely accommodated within family situations or in other appropriate caring environments

- Ensure they have access to and are supported in a full range of educational services, whether this is in schools, colleges or other specialist alternative provision
- Ensure they have access to leisure and sporting facilities which enable their interests, skills confidence and self esteem to develop.
- Ensure that they make a smooth and successful transition from living in care to independent adulthood.

The Virtual School for Children in Care The Virtual School Headteacher in Brighton & Hove is responsible for developing and establishing a “Virtual School”, providing strategic direction and securing successful educational outcomes for all children and young people in care. The headteacher will lead and manage the work of the members of the former Children in Care Education Team consisting of Education Support Workers, an Information and Support Officer, an Educational Psychologist and Education Welfare Assistant.

The Virtual School will:

- Support children and young people in care in school Years 1-11 which will include working with Carers, Social Workers, Schools, SEN Team, Children in Care Contracts, other Council teams and external agencies
- Facilitate and monitor Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings
- monitor attendance
- commission home tuition
- provide transitional support over school summer holidays for those children moving from primary to secondary school
- provide training for Carers and for Designated Teachers
- and above all, improve the attainment of children and young people in care.

Teachers and Education Staff All staff working in education, whether based in schools or local authority services have responsibilities towards looked after children and young people in care. These responsibilities are clearly defined within ‘The Education of Young People in Public Care (DoH/DfES, 2000) and Statutory Guidance on the Duty on Local Authorities to Promote the Education of Looked After Children under Section 52 of the Children Act 2004’ (DfES 2005). These responsibilities cover the following range of activities:

- Admissions to schools
- School transport
- Special Educational Needs and Inclusion
- School Improvement
- School Exclusions
- Education Welfare
- Educational Psychology

- Educational Support to Schools

The statutory duty does not directly apply to schools and their staff. However, there is an expectation, clearly stated within the duty, that schools and their staff will ‘take a proactive approach to co-operating with and supporting local authorities in discharging this duty’ (DfES 2005). All Brighton & Hove schools have an allocated Designated Teacher for Children in Care and a Headteacher, Virtual School for Children in Care is now in post.

Health Sector Managers and Clinicians

The Department of Health in ‘Promoting the Health of Looked After Children’ (2002) sets out the particular responsibilities health workers have towards looked after children and young people in care.

Chief Executives of Primary Care Trusts (PCT’s) are charged with ensuring that health sector children’s services are planned, commissioned and delivered in collaboration with other partner agencies, taking account of the particular health needs of children and young people in care and that priority is given to them.

5. Conclusion

There is no single or simple answer to improving outcomes for all children and young people in care and care leavers and there is a need for thorough knowledge of the characteristics of the care population and a range of appropriate strategies. The aim should be to ensure concern for children and young people in care and care leavers becomes fully and permanently embedded in the culture of children’s services. There are few other specific issues of higher priority for the local authority than caring for the children and young people for which Brighton & Hove has a degree of parental responsibility.

6. Evaluation and Review of the Strategy

This strategy will be evaluated and reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Panel and Corporate Parenting Working Group with the participation of children and young people in care and care leavers. The strategy will be monitored over the next 12 months and a progress report will be made to the Corporate Parenting Panel.