

CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

2017 – 2020



Foreword



Councillor Marc Bayliss

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to introduce the revised Corporate Parenting Strategy for Worcestershire for 2017-2020.

The revised Corporate Parenting Strategy is not an end in itself; it provides an agreed direction of travel and a common commitment to action. We will work in partnership to fulfil our statutory duty as corporate parents to nurture, respect and be ambitious for our looked after children and young people as we would for our own children.

As Worcestershire County Council's Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children, Families and Communities, I am clear that the wellbeing of our looked after children and care leavers is of the highest priority. As corporate parents we have a particular duty of care to all our looked after children and young people.

We know that looked after children and young people and care leavers are amongst the most vulnerable in our community, and that all too often their life chances are restricted. We have a responsibility and a commitment to changing this pattern.

Through implementation of this strategy, we will strive to ensure that our looked after children and young people have the best possible start in life that we can deliver. We will support and care for them as they grow up and take their first steps towards self-reliance and independence. We will also make sure that we continue to be there for our young people as they enter early adulthood, just as any responsible parent would.

Cllr Marc Bayliss
Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families and Chair of Corporate Parenting Strategy.

1.0. Introduction

1.1. When a child comes into care, they become “looked after” and Worcestershire County Council (WCC) becomes their Corporate Parent. This means that everyone who works for WCC, in any capacity, its elected members and its partners – in fact all those who play any part in making decisions for children in Worcestershire – have a special and important responsibility in fulfilling the corporate parent role.

A child or young person is looked after if they are subject to a Care Order or are being looked after under a voluntary agreement, subject to the Children Act 1989. The local authority has a statutory duty to those aged 0 to 18 years. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 extended the responsibility of the local authority to young people leaving care, requiring them to plan the young person’s transition to adulthood and provide ongoing advice and assistance until at least the age of 21, with a duty to keep in touch until a young person is 25, and in higher education. Best practice is an offer to keep in touch with all care leavers up to 25 years, which we aim to achieve.

1.2. Worcestershire County Council is committed to being an effective and trustworthy corporate parent for any child or young person who is in our care irrespective of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or ability. The values underpinning this strategy are contained in Worcestershire County Council’s Corporate Parenting Pledge and in the national Care Leavers’ Charter, and their principles are embedded throughout this document.

Every good parent knows that children require a safe and nurturing environment in which to grow and thrive. Parents protect and support their children in coping with the dangers and risks of everyday life. Parents are ambitious for their children and strive to support them to reach good or better progress and achieve their potential. Parents celebrate and share in their children’s achievements, however large or small. A child who is cared for by the Council has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that they would expect from a good parent in the community.

1.3 For corporate parenting to be effective it needs commitment from all elected members, and council employees in a council-wide approach. The whole council needs to be involved, as well as our partners, i.e. Health, Police, District Councils, housing providers and the voluntary sector, all acting as good parents, committing resources and working together to improve the lives of all children and young people in our care and care leavers. It is about prioritising children and young people’s needs, listening to what they want and supporting them to make the most of their lives and opportunities.

Being a good corporate parent means:

- Seeking the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own child
- Accepting responsibility for all children in the Council’s care
- Making their needs a priority and acting appropriately with clarity
- Listening to the views of children and young people and taking account of them
- Giving young people the support they need as they move into adulthood

1.4 Looked after children are among the most vulnerable children in our community. They are unable to live at home with their immediate family, for any number of reasons, and they become looked after by Worcestershire County Council. This may be through a voluntary agreement with the child's parents or through a court order. Whatever their journey into care looks like, most looked after children will have experienced some form of neglect, harm or emotional distress in their lives before becoming looked after.

Research shows that outcomes for children and young people who are in, or have left care, remain worse than for other children and is something for which we must take collective responsibility. They often do not do as well at school, are less likely to go on to higher education, more likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) and are over-represented in youth offending institutions. There is also a long term impact when looked after children become parents themselves.

Corporate parents should play a key part in narrowing the gap in outcomes between looked after children and other children in the community. The part you can play is to engage with your local school and pre-school providers and to support local foster carers in linking with local community groups.

2.0. Corporate Parenting

2.1. Corporate parenting operates at strategic, operational and individual levels. It has three key elements:

- A statutory duty, detailed in the Children Act 1989 and the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, on all parts of a local authority to co-operate in promoting the welfare of children and young people looked after, and a duty on other partners and agencies to co-operate in fulfilling that duty. Detail of the legislation relating to children, young people and care leavers is given in Appendix 1.
- 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", making sure our moral and statutory responsibilities towards looked after children and care leavers are being fulfilled.

The Corporate Parenting Board will deliver its annual plan in line with the aims of this strategy, and this will ensure that the Board:

- listens to the voice of the child
- celebrates the successes of children in care and care leavers
- sets higher expectations for children, young people and care leavers
- seeks to improve long term outcomes for all children in care – their happiness, wellbeing, educational success and future prospects

- Develops an informed view of County Council provision and services through a programme of well-planned visits and feedback from Board members.

Worcestershire's Corporate Parenting Board has committed to:

- Make sure that the whole council and partner agencies commit to the principles of excellent corporate parenting.
- Set high expectations and seek to improve long term outcomes for all children in care – their happiness, wellbeing, educational success and future prospects
- Make sure that the voice of the child and young person in care influences both policy and the services that they receive, and that young people are engaged with any action intended to develop and improve services or to recruit key staff members
- Ensure that there is a good understanding of current and proposed government expectations regarding the services to looked after children and care leavers.
- Receive reports on qualitative and quantitative information about services and outcomes in a timely manner and review the progress of the Children and Young People's Plan with regards to looked after children and care leavers.
- Lead on the development, review and promotion of the Corporate Parenting Strategy across the Council and involve partners in order to improve services and respond to changing needs.
- Celebrate the successes of children in care and care leavers
- Develop an informed view of County Council provision and services through a programme of well-planned visits and feedback from Board members.
- Link as appropriate with the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel.
- Develop a relationship with Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board and Worcestershire Safeguarding Adult Board for sharing information.

The terms of reference for the Corporate Parenting Board is given in Appendix 2

2.2 Our Corporate Parenting Pledge to looked after children and care leavers:

- Support and help you to keep safe and prevent bullying
- Ensure that your physical and emotional health and well-being is fully supported
- Make sure that your learning is a priority and opportunities maximised to achieve the best outcomes for you
- Support you to leave care when it is safe to do so
- Support your carers by helping them to help you grow and develop into adulthood
- Help you meet regularly with those who are responsible in supporting and caring for you
- Work hard to minimise the number of changes you have in your social worker or Personal Advisor
- Help you to access a range of fun and leisure activities
- Ensure you are fully involved in key decisions being made about your care
- Your carers will make day to day decisions so there is no delay in you being able to carry out safe activities of your choice
- Our aspirations and goals as Corporate Parents will be the same as any good parent. We will require the best for our looked after children not just 'good enough'

3.0. The role and responsibilities of county and district councillors, council departments, and other partners

3.1 All Councillors should be aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities and must:

- Have a clear understanding and awareness of the issues for looked after children and care leavers in the authority area and those placed out of area
- Champion the interests of looked after children and care leavers in all they do
- Ask questions about outcomes for children and challenge appropriately looked after and care leavers
- Ensure looked after children and care leavers have a say in how decisions are made about the services that affect them, and so that they can influence those decisions. This includes councillors engaging with the looked after council and the leaving care council
- Provide meaningful work based training opportunities, including apprenticeships for care leavers within the Council and its partners and contractors to improve their future prospects
- Ensure children placed out of county receive an equal service
- Ensure that the Council, as corporate parent, is keeping the promise it has made in the Corporate Parenting Pledge, and the Care Leavers' Charter
- Require evidence of improving positive outcomes and aspirational progress for Worcestershire looked after children
- Ask how all elements of council business have an impact for looked after children
- Make connections and links between council plans, strategies and decision-making for looked after children
- Consistently challenge "Would this be good enough for my own child?"

3.2 Worcestershire County Councillors

All County Councillors are in the unique position of being able to promote opportunities for looked after children and care leavers through their political power and influence and; through their connections to the community, schools, health services, youth justice, local businesses, employers and voluntary organisations. The Worcestershire County Council Cabinet Member for Children and Families has the lead political role in ensuring that looked after children by the local authority have their interests protected, their opportunities maximised, their educational achievement enhanced, their voices heard and have services shaped to meet their needs. Other councillors who are members of the Corporate Parenting Board have a specific role in ensuring that responsibilities towards looked after children and care leavers are being fulfilled.

Good corporate parenting requires ownership and leadership at the most senior level and this includes elected members. As corporate parents, it is the responsibility of all elected members to be satisfied that there is a joined up, effective and holistic approach to meeting the needs of looked after children and care leavers through policy and planning. This means that when policy is being set or plans are agreed it is important to consider opportunities for improving outcomes for looked after children. The Corporate Parenting Board leads for the Council in fulfilling this responsibility, but it is also important that each Councillor is aware of the vital role that they can play. This can be through scrutiny, through input at council meetings and through day to day engagement with the local community including schools, health care providers and other organisations in local areas. There is also an interface with District colleagues and wider partners, for example, housing.

Support from officers and training will enable councillors to undertake their role in the most effective and timely way and develop knowledge in the following areas:

- Have a clear understanding and awareness of the issues for looked after children and care leavers in the authority area and those placed out of area
- Champion the interests of looked after children and care leavers in all they do by ensuring those who are responsible for their welfare and education are held to account.
- Ask questions and constructively challenge outcomes for looked after children and care leavers
- Communicate with looked after children and care leavers through appropriate channels so they have a say in how decisions are made about the services that affect them, so that they can influence those decisions positively.
- **Consistently ask "Would this be good enough for my own child?"**

3.3 District Councillors' specific responsibilities

- the development of work experience opportunities for young people looked after and care leavers within their respective organisations across Worcestershire, and with key partner agencies
- Help support the development of apprenticeships and employment opportunities, having a buddying system, so individual support can be given to young people

- Have a system in place to support and prioritise care leavers for housing/move-on housing in all areas
- Support/request foster carers being a priority housing group
- Provide priority access to leisure facilities to looked after children and care leavers up to the age of 25 years
- Promote fostering for Worcestershire at a local level
- Be champions for looked after children and care leavers at every opportunity.

3.4 All Council Services

All councillors and council officers share corporate parenting responsibilities and cannot abdicate this responsibility.

Worcestershire's most important collective contribution to corporate parenting is how it can deliver better graduate schemes, employment, apprenticeships, traineeships, and work experience opportunities for looked after children and, most importantly, care leavers up to the age of 25 years.

These opportunities are designed to:

- Offer care leaver graduates opportunities to work in a graduate scheme
- Help young people meet their potential and achieve their ambitions, hopes and aspirations
- Help them become confident individuals
- Give them a taste of the world of work
- Broaden their horizons from little or no experience of employment options
- Help them become economically and socially contributing citizens.

3.5 Children Families and Communities

Corporate parenting principles will form part of the staff induction programme.

The quality of relationships that young people have with their carers and the professionals closest to them is crucial to their success whilst in, and leaving, care. Young people looked after have told us again and again about their need for good relationships that provide love, stability and continuity in the home and in learning, their need to be listened to and involved in decision making, and most of all their need to be parented like other children. This is the basis of our strategy. A good corporate parent encompasses our Pledge to looked after children, and the Leaving Care Charter for our care leavers, and supports the gap between being parented by birth parents to being in the care of, or leaving the care of, the local authority.

3.6 Virtual School

The Worcestershire Virtual School for looked after children is responsible for providing leadership, strategic direction, good inclusion and partnership working with schools and colleges to secure successful educational outcomes for all children and young people looked after. It maintains an overview of all looked after children to ensure they can sustain a school place and has in place support designed to meet their individual needs.

The relationship between being looked after and poor educational outcomes is explained, in part, by the trauma of pre-care experiences, such as physical or sexual abuse and neglect and

attachment. In addition, many looked after children have had gaps in their education which can sometimes be a continuing significant factor whilst they are looked after. Looked after children are more likely to be excluded from education than their peers.

The assumption that being looked after always leads to poor outcomes is incorrect. Educational targets are often set too low, or are not sufficiently challenging, or the support required for a child who is not attaining educationally is not provided. Accelerated progress targets would better reflect our ambition for looked after children, accompanied by appropriate and targeted support, having proper regard to the use of the Pupil Premium Plus and holding schools to account, for each and every child and young person in our care.

3.7 Schools, Colleges and other Education Providers

These partners have a range of responsibilities including ensuring that every child looked after has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) and is supported to achieve their potential. Maintaining looked after children and care leavers in school, and endeavouring to avoid exclusions is an important part of achieving this. All schools should have a designated teacher with special responsibility for looked after children. School governors have statutory responsibilities which include monitoring the progress made by looked after children. Schools must engage with the Virtual School and respect the role of the Corporate Parent.

3.8 Health Service Providers

Health providers have important responsibilities for improving the health, both physical and psychological, of all looked after children. Health assessments must be undertaken and Specialist nurses for looked after children must ensure that Personal Health Plans (Health Passports) are developed with the child or young person and that they are fully implemented.

3.9 Housing Providers

District councils through their housing function and the social housing providers have an essential role to play in working with Worcestershire County Council to provide enough good quality accommodation for care leavers who are ready to live more independently, and provide a range of move-on accommodation for care leavers wanting to move from more supported accommodation. District councils, Childrens Social care and Babcock Prime advisors should work together to ensure that young people are supported to find employment that does not conflict with their ability to meet rent payments.

3.10. Community Organisations

There is a wide range of community organisations throughout Worcestershire, who provide important services and support for looked after children and care leavers, including advice and guidance, mentoring, supported housing, and drug and alcohol services. These services are vital to the task of preventing care leavers from needing the intervention of statutory services.

4.0. Corporate Parenting Strategy – Drivers from Worcestershire Key Strategic Plans

4.1 The Corporate Plan - Shaping Worcestershire Future 2017 - 2022

Children and Families is one of the four strategic priorities for the Council as part of its Corporate Plan - Shaping Worcestershire Future 2017 – 2022 and states that the Council will:

- Continue to make improvements to safeguarding
- Address causes of problems rather than the symptoms by strengthening our services to families at an early stage

It will measure its success by

- The number of families who can provide stable and loving homes for their children
- The quality of our help and protection services
- GSCE or equivalent attainment and progress for the latest academic year with a focus on championing the needs of the most vulnerable
- A-Level or equivalent attainment for latest academic year

4.2 Children's Families and Communities Vision and Aims

This strategy has key links to the overall vision and aims for Children's Services within Worcestershire.

- Our Vision: To ensure children feel safe and have the care and support they need to be healthy, happy and to live successfully lives.
- Our Aim: To ensure that for every child we become involved with, we make their lives better. We will do this by working with our partners, our communities and our families across the county. This is a golden thread priority through all our strategic plans.

4.3 Worcestershire Children and Young People's Plan

The Worcestershire Children and Young People's Plan sets the overall priorities for the Council and its partners to fulfill our duties and promote good outcomes for all our children and young people. The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out how agencies in Worcestershire meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers including commitment to the Worcestershire's Corporate Parenting Pledge and the Charter for Care Leavers.

4.4 Safeguarding Improvement Plan

The strategy builds on the recommendations from the recent external Ofsted inspection as published in January 2017 and recommendations from the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. The Council has developed a detailed Service Improvement Plan to address these issues and summarised into an "8-Point Plan" which is embedded below.



Ofsted Improvement
Plan.pdf

This Corporate Parenting Strategy also provides a link between all our corporate and cross-service plans and strategies relating to children and young people; many of which have specific targets and key priorities to meet the needs of children and families.

5.0. Leadership and the Corporate Parenting Board

5.1. This Strategy will be adopted by Full Council. The Worcestershire County Council Cabinet Member for Children and Families has the lead political role in ensuring this strategy is taken forward and the Director for Children, Families and Communities provides the strategic service leadership. The Corporate Parenting Board will be responsible for the delivery of the identified key objectives and the Board's annual plan.

5.2. The Worcestershire Corporate Parenting Board will lead and support all corporate parenting activity of Worcestershire County Council and its partner organisations, some of whom will be Board members. The Board will reflect its key role of representing the wider corporate parenting responsibilities of all elected members and officers. The Board has formal accountabilities to the County Council and it also has important relationships with the Health Service, District Councils and Police as well as partnerships such as the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

5.3 The Corporate Parenting Board will act as a leadership, advisory and consultative body to the Council and its partners and will provide challenge to ensure that Corporate Parenting duties are carried out effectively and consistently. It will ensure that the outcomes and life chances of looked after children and care leavers are maximised, so they are in line with their peers, and will act as the champion for these children and young people. It is the role of the Corporate Parenting Board, to monitor the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Care Leavers' Charter.

5.4 The Board will hold the Council and its partners to account if there are gaps in service provision to looked after children, or in the performance of their corporate parenting responsibilities. The Board will have access to good qualitative and quantitative management information in order to monitor performance effectively against outcomes, and track delivery of the Pledge commitments. Individual Board members must attend appropriate training to be prepared for their task.

5.5 The views the Children in Care Councils i.e. Big Voice for Little Kids, Who Cares, We Care, and Speak Out will be made available to the Board.

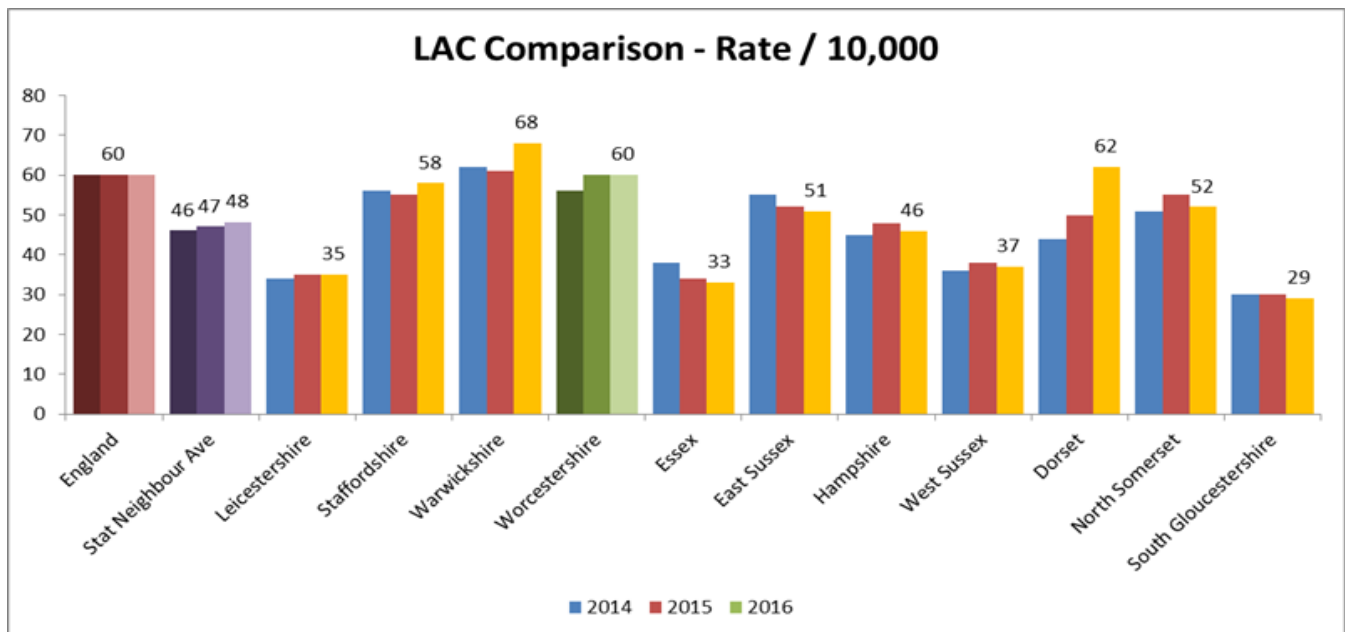
6.0 The Worcestershire context – Looked after children and Care Leavers

6.1 National and Local Context

In the last three years the number of looked after children in Worcestershire has been:

Date	No	Rate
31 March 2014	642	56/10,000
31 March 2015	687	60/10,000
31 March 2016	694	60/10,000

2016 statistics show that Worcestershire has the same rate as the national average i.e. 60/10,000. However when compared with statistical neighbours, Worcestershire is 9th out of 11. Worcestershire would need to see a drop of 10-15/10,000 (circa 200 LAC) to fall in line with average of statistical neighbours. Of our statistical neighbours, Warwickshire and Dorset have rates higher than Worcestershire and South Gloucestershire has the lowest rate.



6.2. Outcomes for Looked after children

Educational Outcomes

- At key stage 2 outcomes for looked after children are below that of their peers in Worcestershire and below national benchmarks. In 2016 only 15% of looked after children achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths.
- At key stage 4 only 15% of looked after children by the council and attending school in Worcestershire achieved 5 A*-C grade GCSEs
- Looked after children are more likely to be excluded from school than their peers

Care Leaver Outcomes

Nationally:

- Around a 25% of those homeless, living on the streets have a background in care

- The average age to leave home is 22 (1 in 10 still live at home at 40), but 33% of young people aged 16 or over that left care in 2013-14 did so before their 18th birthday
- 6% of care leavers were in higher education in 2013-14 compared with around one-third of all 19-year-olds
- 49% of young men under the age of 21 who had come into contact with the criminal justice system had a care experience
- in 2014, 22% of female care leavers became teenage parents
- in 2012, it was reported that looked-after children and care leavers were between four and five times more likely to self-harm in adulthood
- 2/3 of LAs Care Leaver Service Ofsted Inspection judgements are Inadequate or Requires Improvement

Locally there are at any one time about 315 Care Leavers.

Of these:

- 52% are in Education, Employment or Training
 - 20% are in Employment
 - 2.8% on an Apprenticeship
 - 22.3% in College/Training
 - 5.4% at University
- 77% in 'suitable' accommodation
- 16.9% are parents, and of these half have their children living with them
- We have lost contact with 4 (1.2%) of our care leavers
- 8.6% of our young people do not want a care leaver service and are non-engagers

Worcestershire Figures October 2016

7.0. Measures of success – How do we know if our services to Looked after children are good?

7.1 The Board will seek to ensure that current and future priorities and decisions and deployment of resources relating to Looked after children reflect **their** needs and concerns.

Data will be provided to support and evidence progress on the priorities of the Corporate Parenting Board. On reading the data provided to the Board, the first question the Board must answer is, *would this be good enough for my child?* Elected members are ultimately accountable for the quality of the service, so the data received needs to ensure that it is telling them what they need to know.

7.2 This strategy will be monitored and evaluated by the successful delivery of the corporate parenting plan. This will be done by:

- Listening to children and young people who are looked after

- The effective use of local data to identify areas for improvement and the extent to which national and local indicators around looked after children are being met
- The Corporate Parenting Board receiving reports from across service areas and from partners as required
- Seeking external evaluation of Worcestershire's effectiveness in delivering this strategy. This is essential to ensure that agencies in Worcestershire deliver continuous improvement.
- Feedback from partners, agencies, parents, carers and children and young people about services
- Continued revision of actions in the plan in the light of monitoring and evaluation to ensure effective delivery of the strategy.

Appendix 1 - The Statutory and Legislative Framework

The Children Act 1989 is the primary legislation setting out local authority responsibilities to children in need, including looked after children. Section 22 imposes a legal duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of each child they look after. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 extended the responsibility of the local authority to young people leaving care, requiring them to plan the young person's transition to adulthood and provide ongoing advice and assistance until at least the age of 21, with a duty to keep in touch until a young person is 25, and in higher education. Best practice is an offer to keep in touch with all care leavers up to 25 years.

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations and Guidance clarify the expectations of care planning and review for looked after children and strengthen the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to challenge when identified needs are not being met. The manager of the IRO service is required to prepare an annual report that must be made available to corporate parents.

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transitions to Adulthood for Care Leavers gives details of how care leavers should be provided with comprehensive and holistic personal support so that they are able to achieve their full potential as they make their transition to adulthood. It includes the need for care leavers to be living in suitable and safe accommodation and to receive appropriate, consistent and timely support to continue in education or training and to find employment.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced Special Guardianship Orders as an additional legal order to Adoption to secure permanence for children. The Act also required IROs to ensure looked after children have plans for permanence. Worcestershire along with many other local authorities has developed Permanency Tracking Panels to ensure that plans for Special Guardianship and Adoption are not delayed.

Local authorities have been entitled to expect other agencies, e.g. Housing and Health to assist them in discharging their functions since the implementation of the Children Act 1989 (Section 27). The Children Act 2004 introduced a legal duty on named agencies both to co-operate with the local authority (Section 10) and to ensure that they take account of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in fulfilling their own functions (Section 11). It also made provision for local authority areas to set up Children's Trusts, bringing together relevant agencies, and to develop a Children and Young People's Plan, through which it can be evidenced that partners are fulfilling their responsibilities. These are now not mandatory however the 'duty to cooperate' (Section 10, Children Act 2004) remains with the requirement to improve the well-being of children in Worcestershire in relation to: (a) physical and mental health, and emotional well-being; (b) protection from harm and neglect; (c) education, training and recreation; (d) the contribution made by them to society; and (e) social and economic well-being.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 placed a duty on upper-tier Local Authorities and Local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) to undertake a joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) of their local population.

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 requires local authorities to take steps to secure sufficient suitable accommodation for looked after children within their area that meets their needs. It also strengthens the care planning process and the role of the IRO in monitoring the care plan. Children's health and education plans are essential components of the care plan.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 transferred responsibility for commissioning local health services, apart from primary care, to Clinical Commissioning Groups. Primary care and specialist services are commissioned by the NHS Commissioning Board, who are also responsible for holding the CCG to account. The Act also established Health and Wellbeing Boards, led by the Director of Public Health within the local authority, to improve the health and wellbeing of the local population and reduce health inequalities. Under Section 12 local authorities have a duty to take steps to improve the health of people in their area.

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 has introduced a single remand order for children and young people under the age of 18 who are refused bail, which will mean that they become the responsibility of the local authority and will be regarded as a young person in the care of the local authority for the duration of the remand, and may mean that they are entitled to leaving care service, depending upon the length of time they remain looked after.

Promoting the Educational Achievement of looked after children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities clarified the duty to actively support the education of looked after children. Measures include the priority that must be given to looked after children in terms of school admission, restriction on the use of school exclusion and the introduction of the Pupil Premium to purchase tailored support.

Virtual Head Teacher for Looked after children

The Children & Families Act 2014 required every Local Authority to have a 'virtual school head' to champion the education of children in the authority's care, as if they all attended the same school. The person appointed to this role has three key areas of responsibility and is accountable for:

- Making sure that there is a system in place to track and monitor the attainment and progress of looked after children
- Ensuring that all looked after children have a robust and effective personal education plan (PEP), and access to one to one support, including personal tuition where appropriate (using the Pupil Premium)
- Championing the educational needs of looked after children across the authority including those placed out of authority.

This is a diverse role and depending on the number of looked after children and size of the local authority, it is not usually possible for one person to do everything. However, it falls to the virtual head to ensure that each of the component parts of the above three key responsibilities is undertaken effectively. The Virtual Head Toolkit, DCSF March 2010, explains in detail the responsibilities of the role.

Statutory Guidance: Securing Sufficient Accommodation for looked after children requires local authorities to develop a plan to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children

within their local authority area that meets their needs. They can only do this if they work in partnership with other agencies as the requirement is not just about accommodation and placements but also securing a “diverse range of universal, targeted and specialist services working together to meet children’s needs” and applies not only to looked after children but also those on the edge of care and at risk of custody. The Worcestershire Sufficiency Statement 2016–2019 has recommendations that are incorporated into the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the Corporate Parenting Board Plan.

Statutory Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services and the Lead Member for Children’s Services. This covers both the social care and education services of the local authority. These individuals should provide strong leadership and ensure that there is a clear line of accountability for children’s wellbeing. They have particular responsibility for vulnerable groups of children, including those for whom they are corporate parents. The Lead Member should provide political leadership whilst the Director of Children’s Services should provide professional leadership.

The Equality Act 2010 places an additional responsibility on public organisations to consider the needs of protected characteristics (age, disability, sex, ethnicity, religion and belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, plus locally determined protected characteristics) and the effect of changes on them. This legislation also asks public organisations to support communities to get along better and understand each other. Both requirements are valid for adults and children. This work is captured in the Worcestershire Children and Young People’s Plan 2017–2020.

The Inspection Framework

Ofsted’s framework and evaluation schedule for the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, looked after children and care leavers was published in September 2013 and came into force in November 2013.

Ofsted considers a good Local Authority as being one that is an active, strong and committed corporate parent that knows the children and young people it looks after well. It acts as an effective and successful champion of their progress (particularly in education and learning) and an ambitious corporate parent, ensuring that each child has every opportunity to succeed. It actively challenges and engages partners where appropriate to support children and young people, such as engaging a Local Authority’s strategic housing function.

The Worcestershire Children and Young People’s Plan sets out the key improvement programmes for achieving a good service for all children in Worcestershire, and partners are integral to that plan. These key priorities are also reflected in the Corporate Parenting Strategy, and the Corporate Parenting Board’s Work Plan.

Appendix 2 – Corporate Parenting Board Terms of Reference



CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

Purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board

Worcestershire County Council looks after approximately 700 children who are unable to remain in the care of their parents. When a child becomes 'looked after' the tasks of their parents become the corporate responsibility of the County Council.

This is known as 'corporate parenting' and it is the collective responsibility of the council to prioritise the needs of children in care and seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.

There are three defining themes for achieving better outcomes for children in care and their families through excellent corporate parenting. These are high aspirations, stronger relationships and taking time to listen to the voice of the child.

The Corporate Parenting Board is designed to provide the necessary leadership that drives an ambitious and multi-agency approach to improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers. It will oversee satisfactory completion of actions identified within the Board's strategy and will promote the pledges within the Children in Care Charter in a way that becomes meaningful to corporate parents and officers who work with children in care and care leavers. In order to undertake these functions well it must work in a way that ensures the voice of children and young people is influential in decision making.

1. Role and Remit of the Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board was established by the County Council's Cabinet in July 2004 in order to develop a Corporate Parenting Strategy and progress the Corporate Parenting agenda.

The Board is a cross-party advisory body to the Council's Executive and others and is chaired by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families (as appointed by the Leader of the Council from time to time).

The Board does not take executive decisions but provides leadership and a governance structure for corporate parenting in order to drive forward the outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

The Board will:

- Make sure that the whole council and partner agencies commit to the principles of excellent corporate parenting.
- Set high expectations and seek to improve long term outcomes for all children in care – their happiness, wellbeing, educational success and future prospects
- Make sure that the voice of the child and young person in care influences both policy and the services that they receive, and that young people are engaged with any action intended to develop and improve services or to recruit key staff members
- Ensure that there is a good understanding of current and proposed government expectations regarding the services to Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
- Receive reports on qualitative and quantitative information about services and outcomes and review the progress of the Children and Young People's Plan with regards to Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
- Lead on the development, review and promotion of the Corporate Parenting Strategy across the Council and involve partners in order to improve services and respond to changing needs.
- Celebrate the successes of children in care and care leavers
- Develop an informed view of County Council provision and services through a programme of well-planned visits and feedback from Board members.
- Link as appropriate with the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel.
- Develop a relationship with Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board and Worcestershire Safeguarding Adult Board for sharing information.

2. Membership of the Corporate Parenting Board

County Councillors (voting)

- Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children, Families and Communities (Chair).
- County council membership, which be politically representative and will be appointed after the May 2017 County Council elections.

(Representative of the political groups will be as nominated by their respective Group Leaders from time to time.)

District Councils (voting)

- 1 representative from each of the 6 District Councils within Worcestershire (i.e. Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch, Worcester City, Wychavon and Wyre Forest) as nominated by each District Council with the expectation that the nominee will be the Children and Young People's Champion for that particular Council.

Children in Care and Care Leavers representatives (Co-opted non-voting)

- 2 representatives from Children in Care and Care Leavers (Attendees to be nominated by a representative of the Director of Children, Families and Communities)

Family/carer representatives (Co-opted non-voting)

- 2 representatives from families and carers (Attendees to be nominated by a representative of the Director of Children, Families and Communities)

Attendance by Others (Non-voting)

- The Board will be supported by the Director of Children, Families and Communities and/or her staff.
- Representatives of Health bodies.
- Appropriate Cabinet Members with Responsibility, other elected members, officers of the Councils (County and/or districts) or any other individual or organisation may be invited by the Board or the Chair to attend Board Meetings as guests e.g. when relevant to their portfolios or office are considered. Such attendees are not members of the Board but may address the Board or respond to its questions at the discretion of the Chair. Reasonable notice of an invitation will be provided to such invitees.

3. Frequency of Meetings and Items of Business

- A Vice-Chairman will be appointed from amongst the County Council membership of the Board at the first meeting following the County Council elections. The Vice-Chairman shall not be a member of the County Council administration. The term of office will be for the life of the Council unless that Member ceases to be a member of the Board
- The Corporate Parenting Board will meet at least 6 times a year at County Hall.
- Agendas and reports for the Board will be sent out by or on behalf of the Director of Children, Families and Communities at least one week prior to each meeting (based on a forward planning process of agenda items). If a report is unavailable at the time of despatch of the agenda then it will be circulated as soon as it becomes available.
- Urgent agenda items which are not on the agenda may only be considered with the consent of the Chair. In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman be authorised to give consent to urgent items.
- Urgent meetings of the Board may be called by the Chair.
- The Board will not meet in public.

- The Board will endeavour to operate by consensus. Should the Board need to take a decision other than by consensus, then each member of the Board present shall have one vote, and in the event of a tie the Chair may exercise a second or casting vote.
- A meeting is only a quorum if three elected members of the Board are present.
- Substitutions should not be appointed.
- Informal sub-groups can be established by the Board as and when required in relation to particular subject matters. The size and membership of the sub-group will be determined by the Board. The sub-group would report their findings back to the Board.

4. **Objectives**

The Corporate Parenting Board will oversee the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the link into Worcestershire's Children and Young People Plan.

5. **Reporting**

The Corporate Parenting Board will produce an Annual Report in March each year on their work and findings over that year. This will be presented to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children, Families and Communities, the Director of Children, Families and Communities and the Chief Executive of the County Council, and reported through the Health and Well-being Board, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Children in Care Council. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children, Families and Communities will make reference to the Annual Report in his/her report to Council. District Council representatives will report to their Councils as appropriate.

6. **Scrutiny**

Although the Board is not a statutory scrutiny body, when there is a specific need for scrutiny related to Looked After Children and Care Leavers the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny panel may request the Corporate Parenting Board (plus any additional members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny who are not on Corporate Parenting Board to carry out the scrutiny).

SL - September 2016