

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL**  
**CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY**  
**2020 / 2023**

# 1. FOREWORD

## 1.1 The voice of our young people

'We Do Care!' is the Buckinghamshire Children in Care Council. Members are children in care aged 5-18 or care leavers who want to ensure that their experiences, views and ideas shape the services and support available. When asked to contribute to this Corporate Parenting Strategy, the spokesperson for 'We Do Care!' stated:

*"Being a good Corporate Parent means that you listen to us and that you do not dominate. Whilst not replacing the parenting role, being a good corporate parent means having clear boundaries, helping us settle into new homes and getting the most out of these new routines, ensuring that we feel safe, can sleep and eat well and that there is always someone there for us to talk to and to develop our interests. A Corporate Parent builds our confidence and helps us work through our feelings."*

## 1.2 Letter from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

"We want Buckinghamshire to be the best place for our young people to grow up in and be proud of having done so. Every parent wants the best for their children and as your Corporate Parent we want you, whether you are in or leaving our Care, to feel loved and cared about, to be healthy, happy and safe. We will support you to have good relationships with your peers, family members and professionals, and to develop confidence and ambition so that you can achieve successful independence.

We recognise that we have some way to go, but by working together across all services and partner agencies through to the voluntary sector and our fostering families, I am confident that we will provide the care and support you need to help you achieve your ambitions.

As Cabinet Member for Children's Services, I am determined that we deliver on this Corporate Parenting Strategy which describes our commitment to you. We will be meeting regularly with young people to check that we are making a positive difference to your lives. Buckinghamshire is committed to being the best parent it can be for all our children and young people."

Cllr Mark Shaw, Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

## 2. COMMITMENT AND VISION

This strategy sets out Buckinghamshire Council's commitment, explaining how we will be an effective and trustworthy corporate parent for any child or young person who is in our care.

We will also ensure our young people receive good-quality advice and support when they leave care. The offer of support to care leavers will be transparent and shared with all young people before they leave care as part of their care planning.

Every good parent knows that children need a safe and secure environment in which to grow and thrive. Parents protect and support their children against the dangers and risks of life. Parents are ambitious for them and want them to reach their full potential.

Parents celebrate and share their children's achievements. A good parent is also a good listener responding positively to what their children say. A child who is cared for by the council has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a good parent.

Our Pledge sets out our commitment to children in care and care leavers.

### OUR PLEDGE: WE WILL...

- provide you with a safe home to live in, where you feel happy and well cared for.
- work with you and your school/ teachers so that you can do your best. We shall praise and reward you when you work hard.
- help to keep you healthy and feel well.
- listen to what you have to say and how you feel when we are making decisions.
- believe in you.

To deliver this we will preface our thinking, planning and decision making with the question **'if this was my child would this be good enough?'** We are committed to:

- Knowing our children - their needs, talents and aspirations, and promote their interests.
- Having high aspirations for their future and expecting the best for and from them.
- Taking an interest in their successes and problems and celebrating their achievements.
- Encouraging young people to express their views, listening to them and ensuring these views influence practice, service and policy changes.
- Recognising, supporting and respecting their identity.
- Promoting and supporting high academic and vocational achievement.
- Supporting their physical health, mental health, emotional wellbeing and resilience through access to the right services at the right time.
- Supporting their transition to adulthood by promoting economic prospects and preparing them to become responsible citizens.
- Helping young people to be safe and achieve stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- Ensuring that children and young people leaving our care will stay in close contact with their previous carers as part of our 'Staying Close' duty.

## 3. CORPORATE PARENTING

### 3.1 Introduction

Our commitment to Corporate Parenting is underpinned by our belief that:

- The family (birth or extended) is usually the best place for bringing up children and young people and early help is better for children and young people.
- Services we offer must be safe and effective and focus on outcomes.
- Our young people need and deserve support from trusted adults.
- The role of the Corporate Parent is to act as the best possible parent for each child in care and care leaver to advocate on their behalf to secure positive outcomes.
- We need to provide strong professional development and support to our children's workforce, including foster carers and partners to enable them to be effective.
- All our children and young people deserve respect and the promotion of equality of opportunity.

### 3.2 Role and Responsibilities

The responsibility of local authorities to improve outcomes and actively promote the life chances of their children in care and care leavers is referred to as 'Corporate Parenting'. This is because it must be shared by the whole authority in partnership with relevant agencies and parents. The role of the 'Corporate Parent' is to act as the best possible parent for each child, to speak out on her/his behalf, arrange for appropriate services to meet their needs, stand up for them and represent them as needed to ensure they grow up to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Children can be in care in a range of different settings, with the authority acting as corporate parent to all of them. This includes foster care, children's homes, secure children's homes, young offender institutions, secure training centres and kinship care. Every councillor and officer within a council has a responsibility to act for those children and young people as a parent would for their own child.

Elected members and senior managers will:

- Provide the political and professional leadership of our corporate parenting commitment set out in our pledges and for setting the culture of the Council as a conscious and dedicated Corporate Parent.

#### Elected members:

Effective corporate parenting requires that all elected members:

- Are aware of the role and its implications for discharging the local authority's legal responsibilities for looked after children and care leavers.
- Develop knowledge and awareness of the services available for looked after children and care leavers, both across the council and from relevant partner agencies.
- Are advocates for looked after children and care leavers – ensuring their voices are heard, their needs are met and their achievements celebrated.
- Prioritise the needs of looked after children and young people in council decision making and budget setting discussions.
- To consider how new plans and policies might affect children in care, and to ask questions to ensure that those children are getting the best care, support and protection.
- Ask appropriate questions of officers across the council, not just in children's services, about the quality of services provided to looked after children and young people, and ensure that any issues identified are resolved in a timely manner.

- Be accessible to professionals, carers and looked after children who may wish to raise issues or concerns.
- Take an active interest in the issues facing looked after children and care leavers at a regional and national level, and bring any examples of good practice or new ways of working to the Corporate Director of Children's Services and the relevant service team.
- Have a clear understanding and awareness of the issues for our children in care and care leavers including those placed outside the county.
- Satisfy themselves that the Council as a Corporate Parent is honouring the promises made in its pledges.

All Council Directorates should by means of work experience, provision of employment, apprenticeships, traineeships and the future development of graduate schemes:

- Provide opportunities for our young people to become work-ready.
- Help young people become confident individuals by providing a taste of the world of work.
- Support development of relevant skills.
- Enable young people to become economically and socially contributing citizens who can and do fulfil their ambitions, hopes and aspirations.

In addition, all Council Directorates will ensure they have a shared understanding of the needs of looked-after children and care leavers, and where appropriate, the wide council will consider:

- To what extent are the needs and priorities of looked-after children and care leavers reflected in local service provision?
- What more could we do to ensure looked-after children and care leavers feel listened to and their suggestions acted on?
- How can we deliver services to looked-after children and care leavers in a way that mirrors as far as possible the way a good parent would support their child?
- How can we deliver services in a way that recognises the unique circumstances of looked-after children and care leavers?

### Children's Services

Children's Services staff are likely to have the most important direct contact with children in care and care leavers and corporate parenting principles and expectations will be reflected in staff induction and training programmes.

All children will have an allocated worker to ensure that there is a continued focus on improving their individual outcomes.

The quality of relationships that young people have with their families, carers and the professionals closest to them is crucial to their success whilst in and leaving care. Young people who are looked after consistently report their need to feel cared about as well as cared for.

### Virtual School

Our Virtual School for children in care and care leavers is responsible for providing leadership, strategic direction and foster partnership-working with schools to secure successful educational outcomes. It maintains an overview of our children and young people to ensure they can sustain a school place and that there is support in place designed to meet their individual needs.

We must challenge any assumption that being looked after leads to poor outcomes. Educational targets for children in care and care leavers are often set too low, are insufficiently challenging, or the support required for a child who is not attaining educationally is not provided. Accelerated progress targets must reflect our ambition for looked after children, accompanied by appropriate and targeted support utilising the pupil premium for every child and young person in our care.

### Schools, Colleges and other education establishments

Schools, colleges and other education establishments have a range of responsibilities including ensuring every child in care has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) and is supported to achieve success. Making sure that children in care and care leavers are in school and working hard to avoid exclusions is an important part of achieving such educational success. All schools should have a 'designated teacher' with special responsibility for children in care.

School governors have statutory responsibilities, which include monitoring the progress of looked after children. Schools must engage with the Virtual School and respect the role of the Corporate Parent.

### Health Service Providers

Health Service providers have important responsibilities for improving the health, physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, 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. Transitions to Adult Health Services will be managed sensitively and in full co-operation with young people.

Mental Health services will provide direct intervention for looked after children and eligible care leavers, ensuring prompt assessment of those requiring support.

### Housing Providers

Housing providers have an essential role to play in working with the 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.

### Community Organisations

There is a wide range of community organisations across the county, providing important services and support for children in care 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.

## **3.3 Governance: Corporate Parenting in Practice through the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)**

Lead responsibility for Corporate Parenting sits with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services who chairs the bi-monthly Panel. The Corporate Parenting Panel works to recently revised terms of reference (see appendix 2) and is responsible for ensuring that agreed strategic objectives are delivered and care pledges are adhered to.

The CPP consists of a cross party group of elected Members supported by officers and partners including the Service Director for Children's Social Care. Key actions are agreed against the strategic objectives and the required standard of service delivery is achieved. Both quantitative and qualitative data is analysed in order to ensure the objectives are being met.

The Corporate Director of Children's Services along with key officers from Children's Social Care and representatives from partner agencies responsible for aspects of working with children in care and care leavers, also attend meetings including representation from health, education, participation, advocacy services and the independent reviewing service.

There is also representation from various services as and when appropriate. Children in care and care leavers engage in the CPP and the Participation Team presents an annual report on the activity of 'We Do Care!'.

In addition, 3 sub-groups will focus on key areas for service improvement and will be responsible for providing updates on the progress made to the CPP. The purpose of each sub-group is shown below:

1. To ensure a focused approach to identifying and addressing issues relating to the health, both mental and physical of young people in the care of the local authority.
2. To ensure a focused approach to identifying and addressing issues relating to housing and care leavers.
3. To ensure a focused approach to identifying and addressing issues relating to education, employment and training.

## 4. LOCAL CONTEXT

### 4.1 Who are our children / young people

Our Children in Care and Placement Sufficiency Strategy provides a detailed assessment of the current needs of our children in care and care leavers; however, please see a summary below:

| At a glance:   | 31 March 2018 | 31 March 2019 | 31 March 2020 |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Number of children in Care   | 473           | 513           | 492           |
| Rate of care per 10,000  | 39.2          | 41.7          | 39.9          |
| Number and % of children in care living with foster families             | 316<br>67%    | 342<br>67%    | 350<br>71%    |
| Number and % of children placed with a Buckinghamshire /in house carer   | 126<br>40%    | 155<br>45%    | 189<br>54%    |
| Number and % of children placed with an Independent Fostering Agency     | 190<br>60%    | 187<br>55%    | 161<br>46%    |
| Number and % of children in care living outside the local authority area | 250<br>53%    | 272<br>53%    | 227<br>46%    |
| Number of care leavers   | 201           | 243           | 251           |

### 4.2 What is working and what needs to improve

In order to inform the priorities of this strategy, a comprehensive survey was circulated to all our young people. It posed questions about safety and stability, health and well-being, local services, 'having your say', preparation for adulthood and impact of services.

- 49 young people completed the survey circulated, 29 by means of face-to-face consultations undertaken by the 'We Do Care!' Team.
- 88 professionals completed their survey:
  - 25 Buckinghamshire foster carers
  - 24 County employees
  - 21 partner organisations
  - 7 Independent Fostering Agency carers and
  - 11 anonymous responses
- Additionally, face to face and telephone interviews with professionals were completed by an independent source.

The main messages emerging from the above work were:

- Most children and young people are feeling safe.
- Many of the respondents in foster care reported that the carers were making a positive difference to their lives.
- The stability of placements and schools was raised as a concern by some.
- Most responses confirmed that physical health needs are met, but access to timely and effective services for emotional and mental health was a particular source of concern.
- The Virtual School was cited by many young people as a positive source of support.

There was a high level of comparability in issues identified by children / young people and professional sources. This enables a good level of confidence that the priorities in the improvement plan within this strategy (all consistent with the more widely focused ones in the Children and Young People's Plan) are the right ones. Areas highlighted as needing further attention include:

- Ensuring that all children and young people have an allocated social worker and/or PA and that they do not have to repeat their stories to several staff.

- Ensuring that all young people are treated with respect by listening to them; offering clear easy to understand information; records of and rationale for decisions and responding in a timely way to phone calls and other contacts.
- Earlier preparation for independence including options for move on accommodation and further education and career planning.
- Access to and financial support in order to enjoy leisure activities on a regular basis.
- Placing young people closer to family, friends and communities.
- Accessing early mental health support.

### 4.3 Feedback received

The following quotes offer examples of the comments of those consulted and have informed the improvement plan within this strategy:



More support with mental health and having somebody to talk to



More help with life skills and what life might look like when I leave care



Agencies need to work together better



Prioritise what I need and what makes me happy



Use words that I understand and let me help plan how meetings run



People to act more quickly

# APPENDIX 1:

## SOURCE DOCUMENTS AND LEGISLATION

### Source Documents

- Buckinghamshire Children and Young People's Partnership Plan
- Buckinghamshire Strategic Plan
- Buckinghamshire Pledges to Children in Care and Care Leavers
- Children in Care and Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2019
- Care Leavers' Offer 2020
- Virtual School Plan 2020
- Health Plan 2020
- Foster Carers' Charter (currently being revised)

### Relevant Legislation

- Children Act 1989
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Education Act 2002
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Children Act 2004
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Crime and Disorder Act 2008
- Equality Act 2010
- Leaving care Guidance 2010
- Care Planning Regulations 2010
- Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook 2010
- Health and Social Care Act 2012
- Care Act 2014
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Care Leavers' Transition to Adulthood Audit Office July 2015
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities - April 2019

# APPENDIX 2: CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE

## Corporate Parenting Terms of Reference

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 To be the accountable body for the Council and its partners in the discharge of Corporate Parenting responsibilities for its children in care and care leavers as set out in legislation and guidance.
- 1.2 To champion children in care and care leavers, ensuring a strategic oversight of needs and outcomes and appropriate high-quality responses from all partners.
- 1.3 To provide challenge and scrutiny to all partners in securing the best outcomes for children in Care and Care leavers by being aspirational and innovative.
- 1.4 To ensure the voice of children and young people in care and care leavers is central to the functioning of the Panel and there is effective involvement in the development of policies, services recruitment of staff and improving practice.

### 2. Function

- 2.1 To develop, lead, manage and monitor the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- 2.2 To receive and use high quality data to understand where outcomes for children in care and care leavers are good and where they require attention and to drive improvements in response to underperformance.
- 2.3 To support and develop systems and processes to ensure the views and opinions of children and young people in care inform, shape and evaluate services.
- 2.4 To identify and address gaps in service availability or usage.
- 2.5 To ensure that all services within the Council are aware of their Corporate Parenting responsibility and can evidence in Business Plans, their contribution to improving the life chances of children in care and care leavers.
- 2.6 To ensure that all elected Members receive regular updates on the well-being of children in care and care leavers.

### 3. Membership

- 3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel will be made up out of the following post holders:

- Cabinet Member for Children's Services
- Elected Members
- Executive Director Children's Services
- Service Director Children's Social care
- Children and young people's representative (via We Do Care Council!)
- Housing representative
- Foster carers via the Foster Carer Liaison group
- Head of Children's Care management
- Head of Children' Care Services and Commissioning

- Head of Quality standards and Performance
- Virtual School / College Head Teacher
- Designated Nurse (Doctor) Looked After Children
- CAMHS representative
- Family Nurse Partnership Supervisor & Service Lead for LAC
- Children's Adolescent Mental Health Services Representative
- National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)
- Specialist Participation Team Leader
- Adult Services
- Head of Service Integrated Commissioning

#### **4. Meetings and quoracy**

- 4.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel will meet bi-monthly and review annually, its progress / effectiveness and identify any development needs.
- 4.2 The Chairperson is the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Executive Director Children's Services is Vice Chair (with an aspiration that a young person will chair on occasions). Additional members can be co-opted for specific periods of time or agenda items.
- 4.3 There will be additional extraordinary meetings, working groups and workshops as/when necessary.
- 4.4 The Service Director of Children's Social Care will ensure the Panel is effectively administered including the setting of agenda, minutes and distribution of paperwork.
- 4.5 The Panel will be quorate with the attendance of representatives from three disciplines.

#### **5. Conduct before, during and following meetings**

- 5.1 The Panel will have a 'thematic' approach to its reporting cycle as follows:
- Education / Employment and Training outcomes
  - Housing and Placements
  - Health outcomes
  - Care-leavers transitions
  - Qualitative feedback through 'We Do Care!' surveys / IRO annual reports / Carers feedback activities
  - Annual developmental progress review
- 5.2 Panel members will be expected to read all reports in advance of meetings. Reports that are for 'information only' will be circulated with the agenda and noted, but are not for discussion unless focused on the selected theme.
- 5.3 Reports will be written in plain English, presented imaginatively and will have a brief executive summary with clear recommendations to the Panel.
- 5.4 Reports will be shared with 'We Do Care!' 1 week prior to meetings.
- 5.5 Members will receive an agenda and papers 5 working days in advance of each meeting.
- 5.6 Meetings will include 15-minute dedicated time for the 'We Do Care!' representative to ask any questions focused on the chosen 'theme'.

5.7 Minutes will be circulated within 2 weeks of a meeting.

## **6. Role of Panel Members**

6.1 Corporate Parenting Panel members will be clear about their responsibilities as Corporate Parents to our children in Care and Care leavers and be able to:

- Act as an ambassador for our children in Care and Care leavers.
- Speak for their organisation or network with authority.
- Commit their organisation on policy and practice matters.
- Champion the needs of children in Care and Care leavers within their organisation and network.
- Challenge partners and their own organisation or network to ensure we strive to achieve good outcomes for our children.
- Ensure they attend the Panel at least 75% of the time and send a nominated representative from their organisation or network to ensure 100% attendance overall.