

## **Part 12A**

### **Wiltshire Council Corporate Parenting Strategy**

**2016 – 2018**

## Why the Corporate Parenting Strategy is important

Hello and welcome to Wiltshire Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy, which is about what looked after children and care leavers expect our corporate parents to do and work towards to be good in their role.

That strategy is about us – the children and young people in and leaving Wiltshire Council's care. It's about how we are looked after and how things can be made better for us – not just while we are in care but also afterwards.

Within the strategy our corporate parents have set out a number of priorities which the Children in Care Council have been asked about and agreed on. This is important as it means we have had a say about the strategy.

As the Children in Care Council represent that voice of all looked after children and care leavers, it is really important to us that the strategy works, so that children and young peoples' experience of being in Wiltshire's care is a positive one and builds solid foundations for our future.

Also as part of the Children in Care Council we give a 100% but we need to feel that we get 100% out of all our Corporate Parents at the Corporate Parenting Meetings and the Shared Guardianship as we run this programme and we feel like you don't want to hear our voice.

- Children in Care Council members, January 2016

## 1. Introduction

Wiltshire Council (the “Council”) recognises that Looked After Children and Care Leavers are among the most vulnerable children and young people in our society.

The Council has a legal duty to act as a good and effective Corporate Parent to children and young people in its care.

The Council is guided in its duty as a Corporate Parent by The National Children’s Bureau , which has produced guidance supported by central government, including a summary of the legal and policy guidance that informs Corporate Parenting. This strategy has been developed having regard to that guidance.

An effective Corporate Parent will ensure that looked after children and care leavers have at least the same care, nurture, support and life chances as any other child in our society might expect. Where these opportunities are not provided Corporate Parents will have failed in their primary duty.

As a responsible and reasonable Corporate Parent, the Council will deliver on our Promise to looked after children This Promise was made following a meeting with the Children in Care Council who had talked to other children and young people in care to ask them what they wanted from their Corporate Parents. The wording below came direct from the young people themselves::

### Being in Care

- *A choice of when to move on from care.*
- *To try not to separate brother and sisters (however, if this is not possible, try to ensure brother’s and sister’s placements are close together and allow contact).*
- *To allow looked after children and young people to be involved in the choice of their placement from the start.*
- *To find a place where you feel comfortable and ‘at home’ and can stay until the end of your time in care.*

### Listening to Looked After Children and Young People

- *To listen to your views and act on them.*

- *To provide a social worker you can rely on who keeps to meetings, gives clear information, is honest and responds when needed.*
- *Make looked after children and young people aware of their rights and to train others in the rights of looked after children and young people.*
- *To ensure that children and young people are involved in the creation and regular review of their care plans.*

### Support

- *Better help getting into school or college whatever has happened.*
- *To provide support so looked after children and young people can see their family (i.e. transport)*
- *To use reliable transport for young people.*
- *To organise group activities for young people in care and those leaving care.*
- *That if bullying arises for any looked after child or young person it will be dealt with quickly and efficiently.*
- *To support young people in care to find training, education or a job that suits them when they leave school.*

The aim of this strategy is to ensure that the Council's Corporate Parenting functions support improvement in services and to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people. In order to achieve this, it is essential that Councillors:

- Understand their roles and responsibilities as Corporate Parents.
- Scrutinise and challenge how the Council performs in delivering its services as a Corporate Parent.
- Engage effectively, with energy, consistency, and confidence with children and young people so that their voice is heard and has influence.
- Support and enable children and young people to challenge where services need to improve.
- Maintain a comprehensive overview of the progress of looked after children and for care leavers, ensuring they consistently scrutinise the quality, effectiveness and performance of the services that support them.

## **2. Corporate Parenting - Defined Responsibilities**

Services for looked after children and care leavers need to be co-ordinated, focused and effective. Responsibility for this rests at a corporate level with Councillors who will hold senior staff accountable for the implementation of strategies and services.

In 2009, The National Children's Bureau, funded by the Government, created a gold-standard approach to corporate parenting, with a range of resources available to Councillors to help them design the best-fit corporate parenting model for local needs and to understand and fulfil their corporate parenting roles. This has been updated year on year and is available on the NCB website: <http://www.ncb.org.uk/corporate-parenting>

NCB publications identify three distinct levels of role responsibility for Councillors; 'universal', 'targeted' and 'specialist'. These responsibility levels are defined below:

### **Universal responsibility**

Every elected member and manager within Wiltshire Council, in conjunction with members of governing bodies of partner agencies, needs to:

- Understand their 'Corporate Parenting' role
- Have knowledge of the profile and needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers
- Understand the impact of council decisions on all looked after children and young people
- Examine information about current levels of quality of care and services for young people and assess whether this would be 'good enough' for their own child
- If shortcomings in services and support for young people are identified, ensure that action is taken to address these shortcomings and strive to continually improve outcomes.

### **Targeted responsibility**

For elected members who visit Children's Homes or who are members of the Corporate Parenting Panel, and for managers of children's services, their responsibilities are as above.

In addition they will also need to make sure, in partnership with those with lead responsibility in partner agencies, that they:

- Are aware of Government expectations regarding services for looked after children and young people
- Have access to and examine qualitative and quantitative information about children and young people in Wiltshire
- Consider how they are going to respond to and hear the voice of children and young people and their carers/parents
- Continually take action, in conjunction with officers and partner agencies, to improve services and respond to changing needs

## **Specialist responsibility**

This includes key roles of the Lead member for Children's Services, the Director of Children's Services, and the Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel. There is a responsibility for these individuals to:

- Provide leadership across the Council in safeguarding and monitoring the welfare of looked after children and young people
- Ensure effective governance arrangements are in place
- Undertake regular in-depth analysis of the needs of looked after children and young people and the services required to meet these needs
- Ensure the strategic plans of the Council and joint plans with partner agencies reflect the needs of looked after children and young people
- Keep up-to-date with national research and new performance indicators in relation to looked after children and young people

### **3. Corporate Parenting Panel – Functions and Terms of Reference**

The Corporate Parenting Panel is the primary vehicle for Councillors to meet with key officers and to challenge and scrutinise the performance, quality and efficacy of Wiltshire Council's services.

The Corporate Parenting Panel will comprise up to 8 Core Members drawn from elected Councillors politically balanced and nominated by group leaders. Group leaders will ensure that they appoint substitute members to cover absences.

Associate Members will include officers from the council and key partner agencies and comprise of:

1. Corporate Director
2. Associate Director – Children's Operational Services
3. Head of Care, Placements and EDS
4. Senior Commissioning Officer – Children's Social Care (Voice and Influence)
5. A Representative from the Children in Care Council
6. Cabinet Member for Children's Services
7. Chair of Wiltshire Fostering Association
8. Conference and Reviewing Service Manager
9. Designed Doctor for Looked After Children
10. Virtual School Headteacher

If any of the core members are unable to attend a meeting they will send a substitute representative.

On behalf of all Councillors acting as Corporate Parents, the Corporate Parenting Panel will ensure delivery of the following seven strategic priorities:

1. Strengthen the Corporate Parenting Role and Corporate Parenting function across Wiltshire Council as a whole.
2. Continue to improve timeliness of permanency for looked after children across the range of permanency options.
3. Ensure that there is sufficient accommodation for looked after children within Wiltshire which meets the needs of those children. Prioritise placement within Wiltshire.
4. Improve care leavers journey by ensuring an enhanced offer to care leavers across all areas: education, employment and training, independent living, housing options and health.
5. Improve the educational outcomes for looked after children; closing the gap between looked after children and other children in the county.
6. Ensure that looked after children are protected from the risk of child sexual exploitation and reduce the frequency with which some looked after children and care leavers currently go missing.
7. Ensure that looked after children and care leavers have timely and easy access to mental health services.

The Panel will appoint a Chairperson on an annual basis.

To ensure that strategic oversight and critical challenge is effective, each member of board will have a lead role in relation to delivery of one strategic priority.

#### **4. Quorum**

The quorum of the Corporate Parenting Panel will be 75% (6) Councillors, 70% (7) Associate Members in attendance. Where the meeting is not quorate, the Chairperson will adjourn the meeting.

#### **5. Frequency of meetings**

The Corporate Parenting Panel will meet bi-monthly with a minimum of 5 meetings a year.

#### **6. Reporting**

The Panel would report its work through the Wiltshire Council Children's Select Committee. Following each meeting the Chairperson will send a copy of the Panel minutes to the Chairman of Children's Select Committee. On a six monthly basis the Panel Chairperson will prepare a report for Chairman of the Children's Select Committee, addressing progress against each of the seven strategic priorities.

In addition to this the Chairperson of the Corporate Parenting Panel will present an annual report to Full Council which will be shared with the Children's Select Committee prior to submission.

## **7. Terms of Reference**

Corporate Parenting Panel will;

- Make a commitment to prioritising the needs of looked after children and young people and their carers and demand that all departments within the Council prioritise the needs of this group
- Receive reports from the Children in Care Council and act on their views
- Provide clear strategic and political direction in relation to corporate parenting
- Show ambition and aspirations for all looked after children and care leavers
- Ensure that all councillors and Wiltshire Council departments are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as corporate parents proactively. This may involve, for example, the Corporate Parenting Panel organising specific education and training events for all members to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to be corporate parents
- Investigate on behalf of all Councillors ways in which the role of Corporate Parenting can be improved, using examples of research and effective practice from other local authorities
- Listen to the views of children, young people and their carers to involve them in the assessment and development of services
- Engage with children and young people who are looked after, or have left care, by inviting them to act as advisers to the Panel
- Monitor the performance, quality and outcomes of the Council's services in relation to children and young people in public care and identify any areas for improvement
- Scrutinise key performance indicators in relation to children and young people in the care of Wiltshire Council
- Meet with government inspectors, where appropriate, for their input into inspections
- Participate as members of the adoption and fostering panels
- Agree a work plan, review progress, membership of the panel and attainment of its role and terms of reference and report to the Cabinet and Children's Services Select Committee as appropriate, and in any case to the Full Council annually.