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friendly
Leeds



*All photographs
posed by models.*

Corporate parenting

a guide for councillors



Leeds
CITY COUNCIL



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We hope this booklet will help you think about how you can support looked after children and care leavers in your area. We hope you find this information useful in helping you develop in your role as a corporate parent.



Introduction

Leeds is a city with ambition for its children; we want to become the best city for children in the UK. Leeds City Council is working with key partners and our communities to make Leeds a child friendly city where all children:

- **are safe from harm;**
- **do well at all levels of learning and have the skills for life;**
- **choose healthy lifestyles;**
- **have fun growing up; and**
- **are active citizens who feel they have voice and influence.**

However, some children face particular challenges because of their needs or circumstances. It is essential that these children receive additional support and attention if they are to achieve these key outcomes and reach their potential.

Looked after children and young people have a unique place in the Leeds community. They have a special relationship with the local authority due to the fact that they have been taken into care either by a court order or by voluntary agreement with their birth parents. The local authority, therefore, has direct responsibility for these children and for ensuring that they receive the care and support they need.

All local councillors have an important and critical part to play in supporting looked after children and ensuring that they achieve good outcomes. The responsibility councillors have for looked after children make them 'corporate parents'.

Acting as a corporate parent for looked after children is one of the most important duties that you have as a councillor in Leeds. Looked after children should be cared about and not just cared for.

This booklet has been developed to support councillors in acting as effective corporate parents. By learning more about corporate parenting, and promoting the welfare of looked after children and care leavers, you will help to make sure the council meets its responsibility to its most vulnerable citizens.



What is corporate parenting?

The role of corporate parents is to seek for looked after children and care leavers the outcomes every good parent would want for their own children and to safeguard and promote their life chances, providing opportunities and support. This includes having concern for the child's education, training and employment, health, welfare, leisure, housing and cultural opportunities.

Corporate parenting places collective responsibility on local authorities to achieve good parenting and councils must demonstrate their commitment to helping every child they look after, wherever the child is placed, to achieve their potential. Corporate parenting also extends to care leavers, as the authority retains a level of responsibility for former looked after children until they reach 21 (or up to 24 if they are in full-time education).

As you would expect, much of the day-to-day functioning of a council's corporate parenting responsibility is delegated to childcare professionals, including foster carers and social workers. However, the leaders of the corporate parenting body – the local councillors – need to be aware of what is happening on their behalf for the looked after children and care leavers they are ultimately responsible for.

Councillors have ultimate responsibility for the safety, wellbeing and development of all children who are in the care of local councils in England and Wales at any one time – at the moment there are approximately 65,000. Good corporate parenting requires ownership and leadership at a senior level, this includes elected members. It is the responsibility of all councillors, as corporate parents, 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. It is a councillor's duty to ensure that they are prioritised in decision making across the council's areas of responsibility. This is important because their circumstances and experiences mean that they can experience many disadvantages and poorer outcomes than other children across a range of measures including health and education.

Why corporate parenting matters

Looked after children are among the most vulnerable children in our community. Looked after children are, for a variety of reasons, unable to live at home so are 'looked after' by the local authority. This may be through a voluntary agreement with the child's parents or through a legal order [*See appendix A for Information on legislation*]. However, most looked after children will have experienced some form of disadvantage in their lives prior to becoming looked after.

Whilst many of the services for looked after children are provided or arranged by children's services, looked after children are in the care of the local authority and therefore it is the responsibility of the local authority, through elected councillors, to ensure that looked after children are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Recent legislation, such as the Children Act 2004 and the Children and Young Persons Act (2008) have emphasised the responsibilities of councils and elected members for looked after children. The 2007 White Paper, Care Matters: Time for Change made a number of recommendations for how local authorities could improve corporate parenting. These include:

- arranging a forum for looked after children with direct links to the director of children's services and lead member to give looked after children an opportunity to express their views and have some influence over the services and support they receive;
- setting out its 'pledge' to looked after children which covers the services and support looked after children and young people should expect to receive;
- making sure the director of children's services and lead member for children's services are responsible for leading improvements in corporate parenting; and
- providing corporate parenting training material to help councillors make sure effective arrangements are in place locally.

Leeds response to 'Care Matters' is set out later in this booklet.

However, despite high ambitions and a shared commitment for change, outcomes for looked after children and young people have not sufficiently improved in recent years. There is still a significant gap between the quality of their lives and those of other children. For example:

- in 2006, only 12 per cent of children in care achieved five A*-C grades at GCSE (or equivalent) compared to 59 per cent of all children;
- their health is poorer than that of other children. 45 per cent of children in care are assessed as having a mental health disorder compared with around 10 per cent of the general population;
- over 50 per cent of children in care responding to Care Matters said that they had difficulties accessing positive activities;
- care leavers are over-represented in the prison population;
- 9.6 per cent of children in care aged 10 or over, were cautioned or convicted for an offence during the year – almost 3 times the rate for all children of this age;
- 30 per cent of care leavers aged 19 were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

As corporate parents councillors are responsible for narrowing the gap in outcomes between looked after children and other children in the community.

What can a councillor do?

All councillors have an important role to play whatever their position, power or influence, and can be actively involved in ensuring the best possible care and opportunities are available for looked after children and care leavers.

Effective corporate parenting will depend on councillors:

- being aware of the role, accepting responsibility and being accountable for the wellbeing of looked after children;
- making a clear political commitment to corporate parenting and demonstrating leadership;
- committing resources through effective budget setting, and prioritising their needs in decision-making across all areas of the council;
- seeking for looked after children and care leavers the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children – finding ways to support their growth and attainment until they achieve full transition;
- understanding the impact on looked after children and care leavers in all council decisions;
- getting adequate information on the profile of looked after children and care leavers, and their needs (for example key information about the looked after

children population such as numbers and where they are placed, trends and issues affecting them, performance in schools and cost, quality and outcomes of placements;

- making it your business to find out about and develop knowledge of key partners and the various services across the council that support looked after children and care leavers;
- asking the right questions about the quality of care and the quality of services provided and monitoring overall performance to ensure action is being taken to address any shortcomings in the service and constantly improve outcomes.
- question any area of the council about how they are supporting looked after children and care leavers;
- being accessible to professionals, carers, looked after children and care leavers; and
- being advocates for looked after children and care leavers by ensuring their voice is heard, knowing their issues and celebrating their achievements.

Effective corporate parenting will also depend on officers openly engaging councillors in dialogue about relevant services, responding to questions, providing training and information and keeping councillors up to date.



What can a ward councillor do?

- Be aware that there are probably looked after children and care leavers living in your area or going to school there, and understand the basic issues they may face;
- find out who your area assembly corporate carers group representative is – every area assembly has one – and discuss the needs of children in your ward;
- maintain contact with the relevant area locality-based children’s team and arrange to make periodic visits to see and hear from staff;
- make sure foster carers, social workers, looked after children and care leavers know how they can contact you;
- celebrate the achievements of foster parents in your area and attend celebration events when you can;
- find out whether there is a children’s home in your ward and, if so, make contact. The homes welcome visits, though a telephone call to arrange a suitable time is helpful;
- take an active interest in any children or young people’s facility in your area.
- find out if looked after children and care leavers have contact with the police.
- report issues in your ward regarding looked after children and care leavers to relevant people such as the lead member for children’s services and deputy director of children’s services (safeguarding, specialist and targeted services);
- promote community understanding of looked after children and care leavers to get the wider community on board;
- monitor council policy for impacts on looked after children and care leavers;
- be aware of reviews and any formal Ofsted inspections of children’s services and read reports of the findings;
- participate in seminars, briefings on children and young people to increase your knowledge;
- promote foster caring, for example have leaflets in your surgeries and community centres and at events; and
- promote employment opportunities, work experience or placement opportunities for care leavers.

What can I do if I'm a school governor?

In your role as a school governor you can play an important role in supporting looked after children to get the most out of their education. You can do this by:

- ensuring that the school is meeting statutory obligations towards looked after children, for example knowing the number of looked after children attending, monitoring their educational attainment, attendance and exclusions, asking whether they go on trips or are involved in bullying incidents;
- ensuring that information on looked after children is regularly reported and discussed at school governor meetings, at least once a term. Ask what strategies are in place for assisting looked after children in the school to do better. Get basic information – whether written or face-to-face, or via an annual report or through opportunities to hear from looked after children themselves;
- finding out which member of staff has specific responsibility for looked after children;
- ensuring schools focus on raising attainment standards for looked after children and have high expectations of them – schools should have the same aspirations for what they can achieve as for other children;
- checking that the school is meeting objectives and doing the best they can for looked after children;
- satisfying yourself that staff are making appropriate special efforts to help with looked after children's education by making sure regular reviews are carried out;
- finding out if any of the looked after children at your school have a Statement of Education Needs and whether they are receiving all the support they require;
- championing and promoting the needs of looked after children in schools and nurseries;
- checking how the council is monitoring educational standards for looked after children and progressing with the introduction and updating of Personal Education Plans;
- ensuring that older children have a clear pathway into education, employment and training and are supported to achieve their ambitions.



What contact should I have with looked after children and care leavers?

You can be an effective corporate parent without having to know individual looked after children and care leavers personally – personal contact on an individual basis is not generally appropriate, although children, just like any local resident, can choose to contact or visit their local councillor.

Communication between children, their carers, the council and councillors can be complicated – it can be challenging to find appropriate ways of ensuring the voices of children are heard. There are issues of confidentiality and respect, and the needs and interests of the child must always come first.

Some contact and communication is important – as a councillor it can help you understand why you must take your responsibilities seriously. For children and young people it is an opportunity to express their views and concerns directly with someone who has ultimate policymaking authority.

You can become involved in visits and attend events to understand the issues that looked after children and care leavers face and celebrate the successes they achieve, often against significant odds. Your attendance would provide encouragement to the children involved. Occasional events are also organised for our foster carers, who play such a key role in the care and development of looked after children. Again, by attending you can show your recognition and appreciation of the service they provide for the authority.





Further information about looked after children in Leeds

In 2009 in response to Care Matters, councillors worked with looked after children and the **Leeds Care Promises** were developed. The young people decided to change 'pledges' to 'promises' as this had greater emphasis. The promises are described as "statements about the support and services that all children who are looked after and those moving into adult life can expect to receive from their local authority." You can find out more about the Leeds care Promises on the Leeds Children's Rights Services website, at: <http://www.leedschildrensrights.org/index.php/the-promise.html>

The local authority's progress in keeping their promises to looked after children are monitored by the Have a Voice Council.

The **Have a Voice** Council are a group of young people who are looked after by us in some way, whether on a voluntary basis or subject to a legal order, or who have recently left the care of Leeds City Council. The Have a Voice Council meet monthly to look at the services they receive from the council and identify which services work well and how others can be improved. The Have a Voice Council meets frequently with heads of service, lead members and the Corporate Carers group.

The **Corporate Carers** group was established in 2006 to provide a forum for councillors to learn more about working with looked after children, contribute to decision making and hold officers to account for performance in this area. In addition to elected members the group is attended by officers working with looked after children and representatives of other groups that play a key role in supporting looked after children, including foster carers. The Corporate Carers group is chaired by the executive member for children's services. This helps to make sure that it links across to the work of other key partnerships that work with children and young people across the city. In addition, each of the ten area committees nominate one member to be their representative on the group to ensure that the interests of looked after children in each part of Leeds are considered. A number of other elected members also sit on the group to provide a link back to key groups such as school governors and fostering and adoption panels.

The corporate carers group meets monthly and looks at a wide range of issues and information to help them understand and support work with looked after children. This can include:

- schools performance data for looked after children;
- feedback from foster carers;
- details of Regulation 33 visits, Ofsted reports and other information about standards in Leeds children's homes; and
- feedback about the views of looked after children themselves, including details of any complaints they have made or successes they have achieved.

Through Corporate Carers the council has a clearly defined group of elected members that take a lead on the corporate parenting agenda and can report back to other elected member groups and support all councillors in meeting their responsibilities as corporate parents.

Children's services are carefully scrutinised on the care that they provide to looked after children in Leeds. There is therefore a range of information available in relation to looked after children. Children's services provide regular updates to the overview and scrutiny board and the children's trust board on numbers and outcomes for looked after children. This is available through the agenda and minutes of these meetings. Children's services and individual children's homes are subject to regular inspection by Ofsted and the outcomes of these inspections can be found on the Ofsted website.



Glossary of terms

Accommodated

This is the term used in the **Children Act 1989** to describe when a child is looked after by the local authority, by agreement with a person who has parental responsibility for the child. The local authority does not have parental responsibility for the child.

CAFCASS

The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) looks after the interests of children involved in family legal proceedings. It works with children and their families, and then advises the courts on what it considers to be in the children's best interests. CAFCASS only works in the family courts. Examples of matters that may be taken to family courts are:

- when parents who are separating or divorcing can't agree on arrangements for their children;
- an adoption application;
- when children are subject to an application for care or supervision proceedings by children's services.

Care order/interim care order

When a child is looked after by the local authority and is the subject of an interim or full care order made by a court in accordance with **Section 31 Children Act 1989**, the local authority shares parental responsibility with any other person who already has parental responsibility.

When a child is subject to an interim care order, the degree to which the parental responsibility is shared is determined by the court. When a full care order is made, the local authority is able to decide how far and in what ways the parent can exercise their parental responsibility and thus is in control of the arrangements of the child.

Care plan

A plan which details the arrangements that are in place to meet the current and future needs of a child who is looked after by the local authority. The plan is made in consultation with the child, parents and other important people or organisations in the child's life.

Care leaver

Under the **Children Leaving Care Act 2000**, local authorities have a duty to provide good-quality support to all care leavers until they reach at least 21, or 25 if they are in education. All care leavers must have a **pathway plan** and a **personal advisor** from the age of 16.

Child

A person under the age of 18 years, unless married.

Child in need

A child who is assessed by the local authority as being in need of services as a result of the child being disabled or in order to:

- maintain a reasonable standard of health or development
- prevent the child's health or development from being impaired.
(Section 17 (10) Children Act 1989)

Child protection plan

A multi-agency plan in relation to any child who is considered to be at continuing risk of significant harm. The purpose of the plan is to ensure that the child's safety is maintained and the risk of harm in the future is reduced.

Children's services

The department in the local authority providing or arranging services for children and young people, including education and social care. It is headed by the director of children's services.

Glossary of terms

Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

CAF is a locally agreed approach to conducting an assessment of the needs of a child or young person and deciding how those needs should be met. It ensures that services are coordinated by a lead professional, and that needs are met at an early stage before they get worse.

Contact Order

An order made by a court under the **Children Act 1989** directing contact between a child under 16 years and a named person or people.

Core assessment

An in-depth assessment of a child in need. A core assessment gives an understanding as to the most important needs of a child and the capacity of their caregivers to respond appropriately to these needs. Children's services has lead responsibility for carrying out core assessments.

Core group

The group of parents and professionals, identified at the initial child protection conference, who are responsible for implementing a child's protection plan.

Designated doctor/nurse/teacher

A professional who is designated to have specific responsibilities for child protection services within their agency setting.

Emergency Duty Team (EDT)

The children's services team who are responsible for providing a response out of normal office hours.

Emergency Protection Order (EPO)

An order made by a court in accordance with **Section 44 Children Act 1989**, to enable the applicant (usually children's

services) to remove a child to a safe place or to prevent the removal of a child from a safe place on the grounds that the child would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm.

An EPO can also be obtained to gain access to a child where parents or carers are preventing this and the child is believed to be a risk of significant harm. It can also include medical examination and treatment if necessary. The duration of the EPO is specified in the order, but will not exceed eight days. An EPO gives the applicant parental responsibility which it shares with the parent(s).

Foster carer

An adult who has been assessed and approved by the local authority to look after children on its behalf. A foster carer does not have parental responsibility and does not replace the child's parents, but does offer day to day care that children need when they cannot live with their own family.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

A person employed by children's services but independent of the line management responsibility for a child's case. An IRO is responsible for monitoring the implementation of a looked after child's care plan and chairing statutory reviews for looked after children.

Initial assessment

A preliminary assessment of a child who appears to be a child in need in accordance with Section 17 Children Act 1989. The initial assessment is led by children's services and will establish whether the child and family requires any additional support to safeguard and promote the child's welfare, including whether a social worker is required.

Glossary of terms

Initial child protection conference

A meeting which takes place when it is assessed that a child is at continuing risk of harm. All agencies involved as well as the parents and child (where appropriate) will normally attend in order to determine whether the child's name should be placed on the child protection register and to draft an outline child protection plan.

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is responsible for the management and oversight of cases where there is an allegation against an adult who works with children. They also provide advice and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations, liaise with police and other agencies, and monitor the progress of cases to ensure that they are dealt with as quickly as possible according to a thorough and fair process.

Looked after

When a child is 'in care' on a statutory basis, or 'accommodated' on a voluntary basis by the local authority they are known as a looked after child. The child may be in a foster or residential home or placed at home.

LSCB – local safeguarding children board

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children requires effective coordination in every local area. For this reason the Children Act 2004 requires each local authority to establish an LSCB. The LSCB is the key statutory mechanism for agreeing how the relevant organisations in each area will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the locality and for ensuring the effectiveness of what they can do.

MARAC – multi agency risk assessment conference

MARAC is an information sharing framework to help victims of domestic abuse and their families. Multi agency risk assessment conferencing is used to identify victims of domestic abuse who are most at risk of experiencing violence in the future. Information gathered during the risk assessment is shared among relevant agencies to promote the safety of the abused adults and their children.

MAPPA – multi-agency public protection arrangements

Arrangements to assess and manage any risk to the public that may be presented by certain offenders. These arrangements include the multi agency public protection process (MAPPP) used to manage the small numbers of offenders considered to represent a very high risk.

NAI

Non accidental injury.

OFSTED (Office for Standards In Education, Children's Services and Skills)

OFSTED is responsible for ensuring that social care is provided to the required standards. This includes inspecting children's homes and residential schools.

Parental responsibility

A legal term from Section 3(1) of the Children Act 1989, meaning 'all the rights, duties, powers and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property.' Always held by the mother and by a father where the parents are married. Unmarried fathers may acquire parental responsibility by registering the child's birth jointly with the mother or by formal declaration. Unmarried fathers have only since December 2003 (and not retrospectively) been able to gain parental

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responsibility by registering the birth with the mother. Parental responsibility is also acquired by a non-parent holding a Residence Order (Section 8 Children Act 1989) and by the local authority if the court commits a child to its care. Parental responsibility is only removed from birth parents completely at the point of a child being adopted.

Police protection

The power that any police officer has, in accordance with Section 46 of the Children Act 1989, to remove to, or keep in a safe place, any child who is found to be at risk of significant harm. The power lasts 72 hours and children's services must be notified that a child has been made the subject of police protection as soon as is practicable in order that Section 47 enquiries can be carried out.

Regulation 33 visits

Regulation 33 visits are a requirement of **Children's Home Regulations 2011** and the National Minimum Standards for children's homes. These visits are carried out monthly by an officer designated by the Registered Provider (who is usually a head of service) to ensure that practice in the homes is in line with National Minimum Standards. Following each visit, a report is provided to the Registered Provider and the Registered Manager detailing the findings and any recommended actions. We are working with elected members to develop a system of some joint visits with elected members accompanying our Regulation 33 visitor.

Residence Order

An order made by a court directing with whom a child under 16 years should live. The holder of a residence order shares parental responsibility as long as the order lasts.

Review child protection conference

A meeting held at regular intervals whenever a child is the subject of a child protection plan. This meeting determines whether the plan needs to be continued or discontinued.

Safeguarding

Activity intended to ensure that children stay safe; to protect them from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation and also to minimise more general risks such as those from accidents and bullying.

Section 17

The section of the **Children Act 1989** that describes the responsibility of the local authority towards "children in need".

Section 47 Enquiries

Enquiries carried out in accordance with **Section 47 of the Children Act 1989**. A local authority children's services department is obliged to carry out enquiries whenever it suspects, or is informed that, a child who lives in its area is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm. The enquiries are directed at determining whether the authority should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.

Sexual exploitation of children

Children involved in prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation such as the production of indecent images, whether it is by photographs, films or the internet.

Significant harm

Harm means ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development. It includes physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development and both physical and mental health. Ill-treatment includes sexual abuse and

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non-physical forms of ill-treatment, including, for example, impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. The significance of the harm is a matter of judgement by comparison with a similar child.

Strategy discussion

A discussion involving children's services, the police and any other agencies as appropriate, that takes place whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. Depending on the circumstances and

degree of urgency, a strategy discussion may take place at a meeting or by other means, for example by telephone. Its purpose is to plan necessary enquiries.

SUDI

Sudden unexplained death in infancy, where a child under the age of 24 months dies in the home environment or in hospital and there is no immediately apparent explanation (also known as cot death or SIDS).



Acknowledgements

Leeds member development team would like to thank everyone involved in producing this booklet:

Councillor Judith Blake, executive member for children's services

Steve Walker, deputy director – safeguarding, specialist and targeted services

Kay Sidebottom, member development officer

Sue May, head of services for looked after children

Leeds City Council communications and marketing team

