



Bracknell Forest Corporate parenting strategy

Corporate Parenting Strategy for Children Looked After 2021-2024

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“You were born with the ability to change some-one's life. Don't ever waste it.”

Introduction

Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe the duties and responsibilities of the Local Authority to safeguard and promote positive outcomes for children in care and those leaving care. The central principle of corporate parenting is that all Elected Members, Council Employees, departments and directorates should consider children in care as if they were their own children and seek to provide only the quality of care which would be considered good enough for their own children.

A good corporate parent should put the children for whom it is responsible first, be a powerful advocate for them to receive the best of everything and help them to make a success of their lives. Children and young people, who are looked after by their local authority, rather than their parents, are amongst the most vulnerable groups in our society.

As corporate parents, it is our responsibility to keep children safe, make sure their experiences in care are positive, and improve their on-going life chances. We must approach this parenting role with as much passion and commitment as any family would and ensure that our children looked after have the opportunity to reach their full potential. As corporate parents, we are committed to do our very best to improve outcomes for children in care and to this end we have made a pledge to the children in our care, and we have pledged to honour a national charter for our care leavers.

Our challenge is to deliver on the pledges, putting children and young people who we look after at the heart of all that we do so that they have the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential.

This strategy sets out how Bracknell Forest intends to fulfil its corporate parenting responsibilities in a way that puts children and young people at the centre of improvements in the planning, delivery and evaluation of our services. It forms the framework to which all Bracknell Forest staff, Elected Members and relevant partners will work.

This Strategy sets out the responsibilities of Elected Members and Council Officers in their role as corporate parents and the objectives and key actions for the Corporate Parenting Advocacy Panel. It reflects Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review which together with the 2010 Regulations, sets out how local authorities should carry out the full range of responsibilities in relation to care planning, placement and review for children looked after.

Signed by Chair of CPAP (Suki Hayes) & Lead Member for Children Young People and Learning (Gareth Barnard)

1. Vision

Our vision for all children and young people in Bracknell Forest is to:

“Enable all children and young people to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, to play an active role within their community and realise their aspirations and potential through the well coordinated provision of support and services”

2. Principles Underlying the Strategy

Children and young people in our care and our care leavers have the right to expect that we will provide them with everything a good parent would provide in order to ensure they reach their full potential. This means we will:

- Know our children, their needs, talents and aspirations and promote their interests
- Hold high aspirations for their future and expect the best for and from them
- Take an interest in their successes and problems and show our pride in their achievements, and celebrate them
- Listen to their views and ensure they influence policy, plans and practice
- Ensure they are consulted about their own lives and future plans
- Recognise, support and respect their identity in all aspects
- Promote their education and training opportunities, ensuring they develop the life skills they need to thrive
- Support their health, emotional wellbeing and resilience, promoting active and healthy lifestyles
- Support transition to adulthood and promote their independence, economic prospects and their ability to contribute to strong communities
- Give them second chances, and third and fourth and fifth chances and most importantly...
- Support them to live in a safe and stable world where they can develop positive, caring and lifelong relationships with adults and children





**Love does
hard things.
Foster care is
worth it**

3. The Legal Framework

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the overarching framework by providing the right of the child to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting him or her (Article 12).

The Children Act 1989 sets out the main legislative framework delegating to the Local Authority the task of parenting when a child is looked after away from his or her own family.

The Children Act 1989 also requires local authorities to seek the views of children and young people and take their wishes and feelings into account in any plans it has for them. It sets out minimum requirements for formal reviews of their placements. The child should be encouraged to actively participate and express a view. Additionally, the authority should ensure that children are visited, able to access advocates and that a clear complaints procedure is in place. It also requires other key agencies such as housing and health to assist Children's Services in the parenting role.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and amended in 2010 aims to redress the gap between Children Looked After upon leaving care and their peers. The Children Act 2004 conferred a new duty to cooperate on key partners. These are the statutory partners who are required to work alongside the local authority and include NHS, Police, Schools, District Councils, Youth Offending Teams and Voluntary Sectors, to ensure outcomes of the Children Act are met. There are also other partners who do not have a statutory duty to cooperate with us but we will need to engage and encourage them to work with us to deliver the Children Act. These include schools and GP's.

The Act gives the Director of Children's Services a responsibility to promote the educational attainment of children looked after. It also requires local authorities to identify a lead Elected Member for children and young people's services.

Guidance on the Health of Children Looked After places a duty on local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups to ensure every child has a health plan that is regularly reviewed. Similarly, Guidance on the Education of Children in Public Care requires social workers and designated teachers work together to ensure each looked after child has a Personal Education Plan.

The Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations (England) 2010; & statutory guidance; consolidate existing regulations and guidance into one coherent framework relating to care planning and review for all Children Looked After. This also builds on good practice, which has developed since the Children Act 1989 was implemented. The regulations include specific requirements for the child's overarching care plan to include Placement Plan (setting out how the placement will contribute to meeting the child's needs).

4. Our Pledge to Children and Young People in Care

4.1 You asked Bracknell Forest Council to...

- 1) Be honest with you and only promise things we know we can deliver
- 2) Respect you
- 3) Listen to you
- 4) Support you and help you to achieve your best.
- 5) Keep your information Confidential
- 6) Recognise the importance of your family and friends to you
- 7) Support you to be healthy
- 8) Support you practically, financially and emotionally to prepare for your future when you leave care
- 9) Listen and respond to any Complaints

The Bracknell Forest Pledge to children and young people in care was published in 2009 following a significant consultation event with children looked after, young people and care leavers. The aim was to learn from them regarding what they considered important in their relationship with Children's Social Care and the services they received.

There have been a number of developments since 2009 which have extended the Council's duty to young people who are Looked After, for example the right to stay put with a former foster carer post 18, which needed to be reflected in our Pledge. Therefore, a review of the Pledge was undertaken in 2014.

The Pledge was pared down to the nine overarching promises (above) which reflect the areas originally identified by the young people as important, and rephrased to ensure they are all concrete and easily understood. A set of standards was developed to describe what each of these promises would actually look like in practice for young people. The purpose of these is to enable young people to hold us to account with reference to the promises made.

The updated Pledge was officially signed up to by the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel (CPAP), Say it Loud Say it Proud (SiLSiP) and the Head of Service for Life Chances and distributed to all young people at The Bracknell Big Ballot event in May 2015. The young people went on to identify their priorities for service improvement over the year ahead.

A Pledge Survey is held annually hosted by SiLSiP (Bracknell Forest Children in Care Council) and the Participation Offer and a report on this, along with other measures and evidence collated over the year, will be taken to CPAP and SiLSiP. The published Pledge is found in Appendix 1.

5. Who are Children in Care?

The term 'children in care' refers to all children under the age of 18 being looked after by the local authority. It includes both those subject to a care order under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 and those looked after by a voluntary agreement with their parents under section 20 of that Act.

The Local Authority are required to improve the life chances of all children where their parents are unable to do so, for a variety of reasons. These include situations where the parents are abusive or cannot provide adequate care for them, or where there is no parent or relative available, such as asylum seeking children or those whose parents have died. Once they become looked after, children may be placed by the local authority with family members, Foster Carers or in a residential children's home.

Care leavers are those who have been in care for at least 13 weeks from the age of 14 onwards and therefore qualify for services to support them once they leave. This support should be provided up to the age of 21 (or up to the age of 25 in some circumstances) or until they have completed their education if this is longer.

Children and young people in care are individuals and they come from all walks of life and have different aspirations, ambitions and identities. Many children looked after are at greater risk of social exclusion than other children of similar age both because of their experiences prior to coming into care, as well as by virtue of the fact that they are in care. As a result of vulnerabilities children looked after can also be at a higher risk of going missing and also being the subject of exploitation. It is therefore important that the Council ensure there are systems in place to safeguard children and corporate parents can be reassured.

5.1. The National Picture

Nationally the number of children looked after stood at 80,080 in March 2020 which is a 2% increase on previous year and continuing the rise seen in recent years.

- The largest age group (39%) are aged 10-15 years
- 24% are aged 16 years and over
- 18% are aged 5-9 years
- 14% are aged 1-4 years
- 5% are aged under 1 year

House prices in the UK have risen by 8.9% between April 2020 to April 2021 and the national living wage has risen by 2.2% during the same period.

The outcomes for children and young people in care are poor, with research indicating that this group is over represented amongst the homeless population, prison population, are more likely to be offending, experience drug and alcohol misuse and have poor mental health. Disabled children and children from ethnic minorities experience further disadvantage. However, despite the complex needs these children and young people have, many can and do make a great success of their lives, with the right support and care.

5.2. The Local Picture

Bracknell Forest is located in Berkshire, South-East England. It is a unitary authority, having the powers of a non-metropolitan county and district council combined. The administrative area of Bracknell Forest covers approximately 110 square kilometres and encounters large rural areas which can make finding placements within the authority problematic. The average property prices as of February 2020 within this ward are £335,943 which is 35% higher than the national average.

The population of this local authority is around 122,549. This has grown by 0.7% between mid 2018 and mid 2019 and was set to rise by 0.9% by mid 2020. It is important to note that the population of 17 and under for this LA is 28,384. This is set to rise in the coming few years due to the rising birth rate versus deaths in the region.

Bracknell Forest has no areas in the most deprived 10% in England. The greatest levels of deprivation within the area are in Wildridings and Central. These neighbourhoods are amongst the 30% most deprived LSOAs in the country. In the Bracknell Forest region, approximately 2,401 children (under 16) live in families with a low income.



At any one time, there are around 1,043 children in need of social care support from Bracknell Forest Council. Among this number, two groups of children require particularly intensive support:

158 children were subject to child protection plans at 31st March 2021 having been assessed by the Local Authority and other multi-agency partners as being at risk of significant harm.

146 children were looked after by the Local Authority, as at 31st March 2021, and were in the care of the Council either voluntarily (with the agreement of their parents), or by orders of the court.

The number of children referred to social services has decreased slightly by 0.8% from 1,699 in 2019/20 to 1,685 in 2020/21.

Care Leavers are defined under 3 main cohorts:

- 1) **Eligible child** is a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is still being looked after.
- 2) **Relevant child** is a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who has left care.
- 3) **Former Relevant child** is a young person over 18 who was previously 'eligible' or 'relevant'. Council's support this group until aged 21, or longer if they are in education or training.

There has been an increase of 15.9% of both Eligible Care Leavers and Former and Relevant Care Leavers since 2017/18. The number of Relevant Care Leavers remains low over the years. The majority of Care Leavers remain looked after until they are 18. This could be related to the increased number of CLA. At the end of March 2020/21 there were 41 Eligible, 1 Relevant and 54 Former Relevant young people

6. Who are Corporate Parents?

Corporate parenting is the term used for the collective responsibility of the Council and partners to ensure the care and protection of children and young people in care, and care leavers. This term refers to all Elected Members and Council Employees, regardless of the department they are employed in.

The underlying principle of corporate parenting is that the Local Authority will seek outcomes for children and young people in care that every good parent would want for their own children or children within their family. This will encompass the chance to have stability and form healthy attachments; their health, safety and emotional wellbeing; their education and training opportunities; having opportunities to engage in leisure and community activities; being able to celebrate their culture, and identity, and having the right support to move on into adult life. Most importantly, corporate parents, when making any decisions relating to services for children in care should always ask themselves *'would this be good enough for my child?'*

7. What are the Responsibilities of a Corporate Parent?

7.1 Universal Responsibility

All agencies within a Local Authority and all Elected Members have a responsibility and a positive role to play in enriching the lives of children and young people who are looked after by the Authority, and our care leavers. Councillors who do not have a direct role with children can still exercise this responsibility in their ward work, or often in their role as School Governor. They are collectively responsible for the following:

- **Asking:** what is happening to our children looked after and care leavers - quantity and quality?
- **Considering:** would it be good enough for my child or young adult?
- **Acting:** how can the lives and outcomes for our children looked after and care leavers be improved?

And should:

- Be aware of the corporate parenting role and shared responsibility for children looked after and care leavers
- Have some knowledge of profile and needs of children looked after and care leavers by the authority
- Understand the impact on children looked after and care leavers of all Council decisions
- Consider whether this would be good enough for your child or young adult
- Ensure that action is taken to address shortcomings in the service and to constantly improve outcomes for children looked after and care leavers

7.2 Targeted Responsibility

Councillors who take on roles that relate to Children's Services, such as those on the Corporate Parenting Advocacy Panel and Children's and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Children's Social Care Managers have an additional level of responsibility. They should:

- Be aware of central government expectations regarding level of service for children looked after and care leavers
- Have access to quantitative and qualitative information on the service, and have enough knowledge to understand and evaluate this information
- Listen to and respond to the views of children looked after, care leavers and their parents and carers
- Continually take action, in conjunction with officers and partners, to improve service and ensure it responds to changing needs

7.3 Specialist Responsibility

The Lead Member for Children, Young People and Learning, who has responsibilities defined in statutory guidance, takes particular responsibility. The Executive Director for People also has a statutory role defined in Government guidance. They must:

- Provide Leadership across the Authority in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children looked after and care leavers
- Ensure governance arrangements are in place to implement decisions regarding children looked after and care leavers, across the authority
- Undertake in depth analysis of needs of Council's care population and services required to meet those needs to inform future action
- Ensure strategic plans of the Authority and partners meet needs of children looked after and care leavers
- Keep up to date with research findings and initiatives which should inform the direction of the services

8. What are Children in Care and Care Leavers Telling Us?

Listening and talking to children in care is at the heart of our care system. They know what works well, what is less successful and what needs to change. Nationally children in care are giving the message that the following issues are important:

- My views and feelings not being ignored in the decisions being made about me
- Being moved/ knowing where I am going to live
- Getting the support I need to continue my education
- Getting the financial support I am entitled to
- Getting better contact with my family and friends
- Having a safe place to live

Locally there are a variety of established means of hearing the voice of children looked after and care leavers. A primary one is the Bracknell Forest Children in Care Council, SiLSiP.


SiLSiP host an annual event (The Bracknell Big Ballot) to allow children looked after to vote for the issues which they consider most important for SiLSiP to monitor and work on each year. SiLSiP then meet quarterly with the Lead Member for Children Young People and Learning, Chair of Corporate Parenting Advocacy Panel, Executive Director for People, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Head of Service for Life Chances to present the views expressed at the Ballot, to make their recommendations for change, negotiate what action will be taken and then to monitor progress.

The Corporate Parenting Advocacy Panel meets with SiLSiP annually, and works with them on the delivery of their priorities and monitoring progress. In addition, members of CPAP have the opportunity to hear directly from young people in the following ways:

- Participation in Reg 44 visits to Bracknell's Respite Care Provision
- Attendance at the annual Big Ballot; the Children Looked After Awards Ceremony; and at other adhoc events and activities (e.g participation activities and Virtual School events)
- Participation in the 'Do you know!' training delivered by looked after young people to help them understand what it is like to be in care

Corporate Parenting Advocacy Panel also hear the views of young people via reports from the Independent Reviewing Officers, the virtual school and the Children Looked After nurse which include feedback from young people. They receive the outcomes of an annual review of Bracknell Forest's Pledge to children looked after and care leavers plus the individual audits and consultation surveys undertaken each year.



A photograph showing a woman with blonde hair, a young boy with dark curly hair, and a man with grey hair. They are all looking down at a chessboard on a table. The woman is on the left, the boy is in the center, and the man is on the right. They appear to be engaged in a game of chess together. The background is a blurred indoor setting, possibly a kitchen or a living area.

Family is not about blood its about who is willing to hold your hand when you need it the most.

9. Bracknell Forest Corporate Parenting Advocacy Panel

9.1 Aim

The aim of the Corporate Parenting Advocacy Panel is to ensure that the Council is carrying out its responsibilities as a good corporate parent to children and young people in its care and leaving care.

9.2 Scope of Panel's Remit

The Corporate Parenting Advocacy Panel will:

- Provide leadership across the Council to promote the health and wellbeing of children looked after and care leavers
- Take responsibility for the quality of services for children looked after and care leavers including undertaking Reg 44 visits to Bracknell Forest's residential establishment
- Share expertise and knowledge to contribute to finding solutions to complex issues
- Agree strategic priorities for services for children looked after

The Corporate Parenting Advocacy Panel will not:

- Manage work programmes or oversee specific pieces of work, but rather concentrate on the big picture
- Be the main vehicle for the voice of children looked after and care leavers - this is the responsibility of SiLSiP (the Children in Care Council)

9.3 Key Objectives

The key objectives of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel are to:

- Promote awareness of and commitment to the corporate parenting role within the Council and to develop expertise and knowledge among elected members and officers
- To lead cultural and behavioural change within the Council to promote better outcomes for children looked after and care leavers
- Consider arrangements for Member information and training
- Inform, advise and make recommendations to the Executive, and other relevant parts of the Council, about matters to do with children and young people in the care of the Council
- Check progress on priorities for improvement in the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy
- Monitor effectiveness of joint working across the Council and with partners, to encourage integrated working in order to promote the best interests of children looked after and care leavers
- To hold all partners to account for their role in the delivery of services to children looked after and care leavers
- Monitor the Council's performance as a corporate parent against the promises in the Pledge
- Monitor the key performance indicators in relation to children looked after and care leavers
- Listen to children looked after, young people and care leavers and ensure their voice forms part of the Panel's advocacy function
- Celebrate the successes of children looked after and care leavers
- Actively promote work experience and work opportunities ring fenced for care leavers both within the Council, partners and stakeholders
- Identify priorities and develop a work programme for the Panel

9.4 How will these objectives be met?

The Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel will make use of the following activities and scrutiny mechanisms to assist with maintaining and improving the standards of services for children who are in the care of Bracknell Forest Borough Council:

- Review the performance of the Council in relation to outcomes for children in care through examination of key statutory performance measures
- Analyse key trend data relating to children looked after and making comparisons with other Local Authorities
- Engage young people who are looked after by the Council to advise the Panel in order to ensure they have an opportunity to influence the development of services
- Invite regular agenda items from the Children in Care Council
- Use of anonymised case studies to highlight key national or local policy and practice issues
- Keep under consideration the key inspection criteria against which the Authority will be judged



“All kids need is a little help, a little hope, and somebody who believes in them”

Magic Johnson

- Receive the:
 - Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service
 - Children Looked After and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy
 - Participation Strategy
 - Annual Report for Health of Children Looked After
 - Children Looked After Educational Achievement and Destinations and
 - Presentation from SiLSiP
- Contribute to the provision of high quality respite care by contributing to Regulation 44 visits by Elected Members and receiving summary reports of Regulation 44 visits and Ofsted Inspection Reports
- Undertake visits to other relevant service provision
- Invite individuals and groups (advocates, foster carers, volunteers, social workers and other professionals) who can assist the Corporate Parenting Advocacy Panel in understanding the needs and experiences of children in care and care leavers and help to promote service improvements and better outcomes for children in care
- Receive information about comments, compliments and complaints made by children in care
- Monitor the development of, and the adherence to both the Pledge to Children in Care and the Care Leavers
- Ensure that a whole Council approach is taken to the delivery and development of services for children in care and care leavers
- Celebrate the individual and collective success of children in care and care leavers at important events such as the Children Looked After Achievement Awards.

9.5 Performance Monitoring

It is proposed that the Panel take a broad approach to monitoring the Council's performance. This will help to build knowledge and understanding of the wide range of issues involved. Monitoring should have reference to any Inspection Framework which provides for key judgements about whether:

- Steps are taken to avoid children and young people having to become looked after
- Safeguarding measures are in place to protect children looked after, including missing children and those at risk of exploitation
- Appropriate records are kept by the Local Authority to affect statutory requirements under the Children Act 1989
- Children Looked after and their parents are provided with opportunities to express their views and these views are listened to
- Steps are taken to secure a range of care placements which deliver care and support and develop children and young people's cultural, religious and linguistic heritage
- Children looked after and care leaver's holistic health needs are addressed
- Children looked after and care leavers are supported to achieve well and make good progress in their learning
- Children looked after are enabled to enjoy a range of cultural and leisure activities
- Children looked after are prepared for leaving care and are supported thereafter

Monitoring should also pick up on the areas of concern identified through consultation with children and young people/carers/staff as part of the monitoring work of the Panel.

9.6 Membership

The Panel shall comprise the following Members:

- Five Elected Members according to the usual apportionment arrangements
- Substitutes for each of the above
- Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning as a non- voting member
- Two lay members, one with experience of being in care and one with experience of fostering.

The Lead Officers for the Panel will be the Head of Service for Life Chances, the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, the Virtual School Head, (or Assistant Virtual School Head) supported by a Democratic Services Officer. The Executive Director of People will attend periodically. Arrangements will be made by the Panel for the direct and indirect involvement of children looked after and care leavers.

Members of the Panel will be required to attend appropriate training and be subject to a check by the Vetting and Barring Scheme as appropriate.

9.7 Reporting Mechanisms

The progress of this strategy will be monitored by the Corporate Parenting Advocacy Panel and will be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Children, Young People and Learning.

The Corporate Parenting Advocacy Panel will meet four times a year.

In addition, there will be one opportunity for training a year, an annual event, the Annual Life Chances Conference, the Children Looked After Achievements Awards (to celebrate children looked after successes), and the Bracknell Big Ballot to stimulate further improvements to the service.

The normal rules for a quoracy for Panel meetings shall apply. The Panel will have no direct decision-making powers but will make recommendations where appropriate to the Executive.

Appendix 1 Link to Copy of Pledge

<http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/the-pledge.pdf>





Fostering changes lives

**Bracknell Forest
Corporate parenting strategy**

2021 – 2024