



Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

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The Role of Telford & Wrekin Council Members as Corporate Parents

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Policy Governance

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The role of Telford & Wrekin Council Members as Corporate Parents

1. Introduction

At the heart of everything we do across children and families services, including education and skills, is our vision for the children and young people and their families we work alongside to have the best possible outcomes. We support families by working with their strengths from a multi-agency approach and seek to enhance these further in addition to supporting them to make positive changes to reduce their challenges. The premise of our Family First strategy is that wherever it is safe to do so, children and young people should remain cared for by their relational network and this is the aim of all of our support.

This includes supporting the relational network to co-parent alongside birth parents, to take on the main caring role and be supported to do this either by private arrangements/private Law Orders or by regulated kinship arrangements. Where children are within regulated kinship arrangements, then Special Guardianship Orders are achieved as soon as possible, reflective of the ethos of the Kinship Care national strategy.

Where this is not achievable or within their best interests, children and young people need to be cared for outside of their relational network. We would then seek to ensure that the care they receive is supportive, safe, loving and stable and promotes their strengths, ambitions and best possible outcomes.

Our approaches are firmly reflective of the reforms of Children's Social Care, Stable Homes Built on Love. The role that councils play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. Local authorities have a unique responsibility to the children they look after and young people leaving care (care leavers). In this context, local authorities are often referred to as being the 'corporate parent' of these children and young people. The critical question that local authorities should ask in adopting such an approach is: 'Would this be good enough for my child?'

A strong ethos of Corporate Parenting means that the sense of vision and responsibility towards the children they look after and their care leavers, is a priority for everyone. Corporate Parents recognise that children in care have the same needs – to be loved, cared for and feel safe - as other non-care experienced children do. But also, that there are unique challenges that children in care and care leavers face. Nationally, it is acknowledged that the care system can rupture relationships with people who are important to them. Outcomes for care leavers are significantly poorer than those of their peers who are not cared for by the Local Authority.

Local authorities that have a strong Corporate Parenting ethos recognise that the care system is not just about keeping children safe, but also to promote recovery, resilience and well-being. Our Family First strategy is reflective of the ethos of improving connections for care experienced young people, revisiting their relational networks and supporting the development of new, strong networks.

All leaders across Telford and Wrekin Children's Services; Children's Safeguarding and Family Support and Education and Skills have ambitious aspirations for children who are care experienced or who have left care. They have the responsibility to demonstrate best practice, and support and empower the wider workforce to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people and their families. Leaders have the passion, commitment, knowledge, skills and expertise to drive change and advocate on the behalf of care experienced young people and care leavers. Leaders across Telford and Wrekin Children's Services, hold children and young people at the heart of all they do, with a shared vision for strategic service delivery to ensure services are designed that meet the needs of the local community.

Leaders at a corporate and political level take an active interest in the commissioning and impact of Children's Social Care in their area. Their consideration of how services, both within the Local Authority and externally, support better outcomes for our children and young people is ongoing to ensure that this approach is embedded in everything that we do. This is evidenced by a culture where council officers do all that is reasonably possible to ensure the council is the best 'parent' it can be to the child or young person. Statutory guidance on the role of the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children describes how those role models are at the forefront of effective corporate parenting.

The term 'corporate parent' is broadly understood by Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children, as well as those working directly in Children's Services, in relation to how local authorities should approach their responsibilities for care experienced children and care leavers. Corporate parenting is an important part of the Ofsted inspection framework and the corporate parenting principles are referenced in Ofsted's Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework. However, it is vital that all parts of a local authority, beyond those directly responsible for care and pathway planning, recognise they have a key role too.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 therefore introduces corporate parenting principles, which comprise of seven needs that local authorities in England must have regard to whenever they exercise a function in relation to care experienced young people or care leavers.

The corporate parenting principles are intended to secure a better approach to fulfilling existing functions in relation to the lived experience of care experienced young people and

care leavers, and for the local authority to facilitate secure, nurturing and positive experiences for children in care and enable positive outcomes for them.

The corporate parenting principles apply only to local authorities. Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children should nevertheless ensure that relevant partners understand how they can assist local authorities to apply the principles in relation to the services those partners may provide. 'Relevant partners' include local policing bodies and Chief Officers of Police, local probation boards and probation services, youth offending teams, health partners (including commissioners and providers of both physical and mental health services), NHS England, schools and educational institutions. These partner agencies have a shared duty under Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) to respond to the needs of children and their families and as such, they have a vital contribution and extended corporate parenting role. It is the expectation that everyone connected to the council and partner agencies share the same passion, drive and ambitions for care experienced children and young people, and those leaving care.

There is statutory guidance from the Department for Education, issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act (1970). This means that it must be followed unless there are exceptional circumstances that justify departing from it. The guidance sets the framework through which local authorities discharge their statutory duty under 22(3A) of the Children Act (1989) to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children, including those children placed outside the local authority. The Children and Families Act (2014) amended section 22 of the Children Act (1989) to require every local authority in England to appoint an officer employed by the authority, or another authority, to make sure that its duty to promote the educational achievement of its looked-after children is properly discharged. This officer is referred to as the Virtual School Headteacher or VSHT.

National guidance and research demonstrate that care experienced and previously looked-after children start with the disadvantage of their pre-care experiences, and often have special educational needs. VSHTs have a key role to ensure these children have the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential - an important part of why this role was made statutory. For those who are care experienced, as part of a local authority's Corporate Parent role, the VSHT needs to be the educational advocate that parents are for others.

For previously looked-after children, the VSHT will be a source of advice and information to help their parents to advocate for them as effectively as possible. VSHTs are not acting as part of the corporate parent role in these circumstances but are there to promote the educational achievement of these children through the provision of advice and guidance. The leadership of the VSHT is vital, now more than ever, given the impact of the pandemic on the learning of all children – none more so than the most vulnerable. For example, in the 2020 to 2021 academic year, children in need lost an average of 4.1 months of learning in secondary school reading, compared with 2.4 months for all children.

In September 2021, local authorities began receiving funding to extend the role of virtual school heads to include strategic responsibility for children with a social worker.

Using their expertise and knowledge from working with looked-after (care experienced) and previously looked-after children, virtual school heads have made progress in:

- understanding and addressing the barriers and challenges this group face in attending school
- strengthening partnerships between education settings and local authorities
- establishing a culture of high aspirations that helps these children to progress in education

This extended role does not require virtual school heads to provide direct intervention, help, or support for individual children with a social worker or their families, but instead provides advice and guidance to education settings and social care colleagues.

2. Corporate Parenting Principles

In order to thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. The Corporate Parenting Principles set out seven principles that Local Authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to children in care, as follows:

1. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
2. to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
3. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
4. to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
5. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
6. for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
7. to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

The corporate parenting principles do not exist in a vacuum. They should shape the mind-set and culture of every part of a Local Authority in how it carries out all of its functions in relation to children in care and care leavers. In Telford and Wrekin, we are committed to supporting the children we care for and young people leaving our care, to have happy and healthy childhoods and be well prepared for a transition to adulthood. We will seek to support all care experienced young people and those leaving care to reach their full potential.

We are committed to showing our care and support through our actions, underpinned by principles of positive regard, honouring and championing strengths, to ensure children and young people feel a sense of belonging. We have high aspirations for children and young people and will ensure we advocate on their behalf.

The Corporate Parenting Principles are not about applying a formulaic approach to how services are delivered in relation to supporting care experienced children/young people and care leavers. Rather, they describe the behaviours and attitudes expected of councils when they are acting as any good parent would do by supporting, encouraging and guiding their children to lead healthy, rounded and fulfilled lives. The principles intend to ensure that all councils have high ambitions for the children in their care. In doing so, the application of the principles must respond to the individual needs, vulnerabilities or disadvantages of care experienced children and young people and care leavers. This will assist in securing that such children and young people are not placed at significant disadvantage when compared with the support a non-care experienced child or young person may receive from their family.

3. Leadership

Strong corporate parenting means strong leadership, challenge and accountability at every level. The quality of support can be measured in how the child or young person experiences the support they receive and the extent to which they feel listened to and taken seriously. To that end, Telford & Wrekin Council have established the Corporate Parenting Strategic Group to look at the way in which children in care and care leavers experience services. The impact of the Corporate Parenting Principles is measured based on the feedback from our children in care and care leavers.

4. Corporate Parenting Strategy

Telford & Wrekin Council have developed a 'Corporate Parenting Strategy'. This defines the activity across the partnership to support young people to achieve the best possible outcomes. At the heart of this strategy is 'The Promise'. This has been developed alongside young people and identifies the seven priorities for Corporate Parents. [Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025](#)

The Promise

Being an individual

Believe in and trust you - celebrating all you have to offer and all that you achieve.

Give you fair boundaries.



Respect and value

Treat you with respect and support your individual identity.

Work with you to consider your choices and options.



Hearing your voice

Listen to your thoughts, wishes and feelings.

Put your needs and feelings at the heart of decisions.



Being safe and healthy

Make sure you have a good carer where you feel part of the family.

Make sure you have access to health services and guidance, including mental health support.



Developing your independence

Help you develop the skills needed to look after yourself.

Help you follow the pathway right for you and provide access to appropriate accommodation.



Fulfilling your ambitions

Ensure there are no barriers to you achieving your dreams and ambitions.

Offer you opportunities to enrich your education through extracurricular opportunities.



Building strong relationships

Support you to build strong relationships with people that are important to you.

Provide easy access to impartial information, advice and guidance



5. Key lines of enquiry for Councillors

What are the characteristics of our cohort of children in care and care leavers?

Understanding the characteristics of children and young people is the first step to making sure that councils are able to act in their interests. The Children in Care team will have information on the children in the council's care, including:

- age and length of time the child/young person has been placed in care
- where children are currently living
- number of children cared for in foster care, children's homes or other settings (including residential schools, hospitals and custodial institutions)
- number of children awaiting adoption
- number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- placement stability
- accommodation and employment information about care leavers
- education information

An unaccompanied child looked after by a local authority is entitled to the same local authority support as any other care experienced child: to have a safe and stable placement; to receive the care that they need to thrive; and the support they need to fulfil their educational and other outcomes. Some unaccompanied children who have recently arrived in the country may never have had access to education before.

Appropriate education for unaccompanied children may include a period of time in a setting where their full educational needs can be assessed and integrated into the PEP (Personal Education Plan). They may need time to be prepared for and then become used to formal education, and their initial educational outcomes may include cultural orientation and life skills appropriate to their age. Virtual School Headteachers, Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, School Admission Officers and Special Educational Needs departments should work together to ensure that appropriate education provision for the child is arranged at the same time as a placement.

The local authority should ensure robust procedures are in place to monitor educational progress. This includes securing a culture of commitment to promoting the highest possible educational outcomes for unaccompanied children or child victims of modern slavery. Achieving and implementing the above should be monitored by the VSHT, who is responsible for making sure their local authority promotes the educational achievement of its looked-after and previously looked-after children.

The Corporate Parenting Strategic Group and children's scrutiny committee should also receive information about social worker workloads, making sure that these are manageable and social workers are able to dedicate sufficient time to children, regardless of their needs.

Do all of our councillors and officers know about their corporate parenting responsibilities?

Every councillor should ideally have training on their corporate parenting role when first elected. It is every councillor's responsibility to consider how new plans and policies might affect children in care, and to ask questions to ensure that those children and young people are getting the best care, support and protection.

There are certain departments within a council that this will be particularly important for, such as education, housing, leisure and skills, but every part of the council needs to consider how its work impacts on care experienced young people and care leavers, and to consider ways of raising awareness about the corporate parenting role, for example inviting all councillors to any celebration events.

Do our partner agencies understand their role in supporting us as corporate parents?

The council has a duty, under Section 10 of the Children Act 2004, to promote cooperation between local partners to improve the wellbeing of young people in the area. This includes:

- physical, mental health and emotional wellbeing
- protection from harm and neglect
- education, training and recreation
- the contribution made by young people to society
- social and economic wellbeing

Relevant partners include the police, probation services, the NHS, schools and further education providers.

The participation of partners to promote the wellbeing of all children and young people is vital and it is important that they understand the specific needs of children in care so that this can be taken account of in their plans. For example, children in care are more likely to need support with their emotional wellbeing, so colleagues in the NHS will need to consider this. In addition to ensuring their safety, it is paramount that the pull factors for missing behaviours are understood, and that this is shared with the Police and other partner agencies to understand the challenges for our young people.

In addition to the support the wider sector can provide, local businesses might consider offering apprenticeships to children in care, leisure facilities might be able to offer discounts or free memberships, linking care leavers with peer support groups and other initiatives within the voluntary sector.

How are we giving children and young people the chance to express their views, wishes and feelings? How do we know those are being acted on?

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children Act 1989 state that every child has the right to express their views, wishes and feelings in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. The Social Care reforms make it clear that children and young people's voices should be at the heart of all we do.

Children should be involved in developing their care plans and being supported to attend and contribute in meetings where decisions are made about their life. They should be provided with advocates to help them do this when required. It might be useful to also consider information about how the rights of care experienced young people are positively promoted and upheld. This includes all practitioners that are working alongside them who are responsible for progressing their plans, including the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer.

Likewise, care leavers need to be integral to the development of their pathway plans, with their wishes, views, and aspirations at the heart of the plan. Plans should be co-produced and led by children and young people.

Telford & Wrekin Council have established a Young Persons' Panel for Children in Care and other forums, such as Voice, Children with Disabilities and Leavers Come First. These are a mechanism to collect the wider views of care experienced young people and care leavers to ensure that these inform strategic practice. There is an ongoing, two-way, dialogue between the Young Persons' Panel and the Corporate Parenting Strategic Group.

It is also important to consider those children placed out of area and at a distance, in addition to how we promote the voices of children and young people that can be harder to hear owing to need or circumstance. Working on the premise that all care experienced young people and care leavers have a right to be heard, support must be put in place to give them that opportunity.

All children and young people are informed of actions taken as a result of their feedback to show the young people that their voices are being heard, and changes are being made as a result.

How do we show children in our care that we have high aspirations for them?

Councils should be ambitious for every child in their care, working with and encouraging them to achieve their full potential, from overcoming instability or trauma to progressing well in education, learning and training, whilst pursuing hobbies and developing their talents, depending on what is most appropriate for the individual child. This is our role as Corporate Parents.

It is important to recognise that children in care are likely to have had very different experiences to their peers, therefore they might be at very different stages at school to other children of the same age. Additionally, in 2023, 58.1% of children in care had a special educational need, compared to 17.1% of all children. This figure rises to 80% for children in residential care. Providing the appropriate support can help children begin to overcome earlier trauma and disadvantage: research shows that children in care achieve better educational outcomes than children in need who stay at home, thanks to the protective factor of that care. The VSHT will keep the council updated with how Children in Care are progressing in school, what support is provided to those with special educational needs, and what action is being taken to help them reach their potential.

Children and young people thrive on recognition and reward. It is important to make sure that children in care receive this in the same way children in the rest of the population do. Hosting award ceremonies and celebrating successes with our Young People throughout the year, whilst encouraging continued resilience to overcome barriers to learning will all help to reassure children that their efforts are recognised, supported and cared about.

As young people approach leaving care, they should be getting support from their social worker and a personal adviser to consider their future options. The Virtual School Head Teacher and the Virtual School Team can make sure that young people are encouraged to think broadly and ambitiously about their options and how to get there and provide continued support in the process of entering further education, employment or training.

Are we providing stable environments for children in our care?

The recent Social Care Reforms set ambitious plans to strengthen and support the care arrangements of our children and young people, as it is known that they can experience instability and ruptured relationships.

Within Telford and Wrekin Children's Services our Family First permanency strategy was implemented ahead of the reforms and sets out how we continue to support relationships, connection and stability for care experienced children and young people.

Stability for children and young people is linked to improved mental health and educational attainment. It also helps children to develop relationships, feel more secure and build a sense of belonging which is lifelong.

It is important that the council takes action to limit instability for children and young people as it is not in their best interests. However, it is also important to recognise that some moves may be unavoidable. Where this does occur, our Family First strategy also sets out arrangements for keeping in touch with significant people the child loves and has relationships with.

What are we doing to look after the health and wellbeing of children in our care?

The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS) is in place to meet the needs and minimise inequalities. The health and wellbeing board is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the JHWS. Particular areas of focus include:

- mental health services – care experienced young people are four times more likely to experience mental health challenges than their peers.
- sexual health and family planning services – a quarter of young women leaving care are pregnant and nearly half become pregnant within two years. It is important to support young people with sexual health and relationship advice.
- substance and alcohol prevention services – a third of young people leaving care report problems with drugs or alcohol within a year. It is important that adequate advice and guidance in relation to this area is provided, as well as sign posting to support where substance misuse or alcohol difficulties are present.

It is important to remember that our care experienced children and young people will have experienced significant trauma, others will have had unstable home lives, and some may lack good support networks. It is the responsibility of councils, as corporate parents, to work hard to tackle those issues and support the children to aid their recovery and development.

As corporate parents, councillors need to challenge any stigma and discrimination faced by care experienced children and young people and care leavers, and to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes. It is important that councillors believe in children and young people in care and care leavers, and advocate for their best possible outcomes.

Care experienced children and young people receive an annual health assessment (every six months for under-fives). These are completed in a child-friendly manner that is sensitive, however it is made clear that they understand their right to opt out if they choose to do so.

In order to improve wellbeing, it is important to offer children and young people access to sports facilities, music lessons and other activities outside of school. It is important that children and young people are encouraged to pursue an interest of their choice and that this is supported by adults who care for them and work alongside them.

What are we doing to ensure that our children in care are not unnecessarily criminalised?

With the growth of child exploitation, it is essential that as corporate parents, councils are doing all that they can to prevent children in care from being exploited.

It is important to understand the pull factors for children and young people who engage in criminal activities/anti-social behaviour and how these can be addressed at the earliest stage. Young people identified as being at risk of exploitation are allocated a Children Abused Through Exploitation (CATE) worker. For young people involved with gangs, St Giles workers are allocated.

It is vital that all agencies work closely to ensure that children and young people live safely in their community and that they are protected from harm outside of the home. This includes direct collaboration between the Local Authority, Carers, Youth Justice Service and the Police.

What are outcomes like for our care leavers?

As a corporate parent, it is our responsibility to ensure that care leavers are getting the support they need to lead successful lives.

Care leavers can face a wide variety of challenges. Depending on their individual needs and their experiences to date, they need the support of the adults to help them to overcome their own challenges to progress. It is important they know that support is there as they make the transition to adulthood which may also include independent living.

Each young person's pathway plan should consider their options for when they have left school - whether they want to go on to further study or straight into the world of work etc. Their aspirations and options for employment and employment-based learning should be known and support provided to enable them to consider their options. Work should start on this plan well in advance of a young person leaving care.

The Local Authority will continue to have links with employment and education providers to advocate for roles for care experienced young people. In addition, apprentice roles are offered within the Local Authority.

For those aiming for university and further education, children in care should be getting support at school to help them achieve the best results they are capable of. It is also important to look at pathway plans to see how children are reassured about university as it is a scary prospect for most young people. Care leavers will need to know how they will manage their finances, and where they can go during the long university holidays.

For young people that are not progressing to further education or employment, support should be provided to ascertain their area of interest and locate learning opportunities that reflect these areas.

The availability of suitable housing is a key issue for care leavers, as is preparation for moving on to independent living. Care leavers should not be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, and the type of housing that they will move into after leaving care should be included in the pathway plan. Some young people will need more support than others as they move towards independence, while all will need to know that there are contingency plans should they be required.

Wherever possible children and young people should remain close to their community and relational networks and every effort will be made to ensure this occurs. However, on occasions there may be situations where this cannot be achieved, owing to a variety of factors such as safety considerations or identifying a care arrangement that better suits their needs. It is vital that they have support to manage any transition that this brings for children and young people, including moving to a new school, managing grief and loss that can be associated with moving and re connection to a new community. Where this is required, efforts will continue to be made to ensure that links to their relational network are promoted, if in their best interests, and plans if their needs change to seek alternative caring arrangements closer to home should always continue to factor in their care and pathway planning.

We continue to monitor and review the sufficiency of our caring arrangements, including foster care placements and residential providers to ensure that they meet the needs of the children and young people we care for. We continue to develop services to support placement stability. This includes a therapeutic offer. We are innovative in terms of working with providers in measuring progress towards reducing the vulnerabilities of children and to increase identified strengths further.

We have a robust plan in terms of recruiting foster carers and ensuring they receive the support they need to meet the needs of children they care for. There are continued plans to support the placement stability and security of children who are cared for which are led at a senior leadership level.

Adapted from:

- *Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) DfE, February 2018.*
- *Corporate parenting resource pack; Local Government Association; September 2019.*
- *Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-25; Telford & Wrekin Council.*
- *Championing kinship care: the national kinship care strategy (publishing.service.gov.uk) DfE, December 2023*
- *Children's social care: national framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk), DfE, December 2023, updated February 2024*
- *Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love consultation response (publishing.service.gov.uk) DfE, September 2023,*
- *Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children (publishing.service.gov.uk) DfE, February 2018*
- *Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) DfE, Updated March 2024*
- *Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) DfE, Updated April 202*