



THE LONDON BOROUGH
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Corporate Parenting Strategy 2014 - 2016



Delivering the best outcomes for children in care

Foreword

In Bromley we rightly take pride in our services for Children in Care and Care Leavers.

Our dedicated Looked After Children's Team and Leaving Care Team are staffed by an experienced and stable group of social workers and personal advisors, working alongside our education and health colleagues.

We have developed a London Borough of Bromley Pledge and written a set of Placement Promises that provide a benchmark against which our provision for children and young people can be measured.

As Children's Services throughout the country face a period of financial constraint and adjustment, we are thinking carefully about our priorities, how we can continue to provide an excellent standard of care that places children and young people at the heart of all that we do and fulfil our corporate parenting duties.

For example, we want to help our care leavers make the most of opportunities through supporting and developing initiatives that can help them become secure, productive and economically independent members of our society. We want to make sure that social workers spend more time with children and the people looking after them and less time in front of computers and on data collection. We want to make sure that children in our care feel that they have a say in how their lives are planned and organised.

We know that all the children we are responsible for as corporate parents are unique individuals and that the way we provide our services must, as far as possible, take this into account. We know for example that whilst some children in care want to be invited to help shape services, many don't. They simply want to be able to get on with their lives in the same way as other children do, without the perceived stigma of being in care.

As corporate parents the question we should ask ourselves is - 'if this child were mine, what would I want for them?' This is the unique challenge faced by all of us with a responsibility to provide a service for children in our care. We hope that this document will provide you with some insights as to how we aim to fulfil this vital role.

Cllr Stephen Carr
Lead Member

Terry Parkin
Director of Education, Care and Health Services

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Corporate Parenting

Introduction

Looked after children, young people and care leavers continue to be recognised as a vulnerable group in society, despite the attention over recent years towards improving outcomes for them. We recognise that looked after children, young people and care leavers are particularly disadvantaged and will need additional support and specialist services.

This strategy sets out how Bromley Council and its partner agencies intend to carry out their corporate parenting responsibilities for looked after children, young people and care leavers.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out our vision and strategic priorities for services for looked after children in Bromley for the period 2014-2015. It sets out the key areas of focus from the strategic priorities together with the planning and governance arrangements to achieve them. The strategy is underpinned by the service business plan, related strategies for placements and care planning and various work streams.

Bromley Council is committed to doing all they can to provide high quality services that promote good outcomes for children and young people. As an authority, we accept the responsibilities and challenges of being corporate parents, and by working together, we are confident that we can meet the needs of our looked after children, young people and care leavers.

Looked after children and young people are individuals and they come from all walks of life and have different aspirations, ambitions and identities. Our commitment is to support them to achieve their full potential and to celebrate their successes.

Looked after Children, Young People and Care Leavers

The term looked after children, young people and care leavers applies to all children being looked after by Bromley Council, including those children subject to a Care Order under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 as well as those children looked after on a voluntary basis through agreement with their parents under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. This group includes looked after disabled children, young people and care leavers as well as those children who have sought refugee status in the UK.

Key Legislation, Legal and Policy Framework

The concept of the corporate parent has been developed through legislation, policy development and guidance and includes:

- The Quality Protects programme (1988)
- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Adoption & Children Act (2002)
- If this were my child – A Councillor’s guide to being a good corporate parent (2003)
- Every Child Matters (2003)
- Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children : Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities –Children Act (2004) -updated 2010

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013)
- Care Matters : transforming Lives of Young people in care
- Making the Difference – Putting the care back into corporate parenting (2007)
- Care Matters: Time to deliver for children in care (2008), Children & Young Persons Act (2008)
- Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (2010)
- Care Leaver Strategy (2013)

What is Corporate Parenting?

Bromley Council aims to support the majority of its children and young people within their own families and communities. For a small number of children this is not always possible and they require alternative care.

The term **Corporate Parenting** is used for the collective responsibility of the whole Council, elected Members, employees and partner agencies to ensure the best care and protection of children and young people looked after, as well as care leavers.

All agencies within the Local Authority have a responsibility and a role to play in promoting positive outcomes in the lives of children and young people who are looked after.

Governance arrangements

The Executive Working Party for Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting meets each quarter and its main function is to oversee the Corporate Parenting Strategy to ensure outcomes fulfil the Council's responsibilities towards Looked After Children. Within the membership of the Executive Working Party is the Portfolio Holder for care services, education and public protection and safety. Each portfolio lead also sits as a member of the Council Executive and decides upon the wider strategic council priorities. Members of the living in care council (LinCC) attend and provide Members and Officers with updates on the work they are undertaking.

The focus of the working party includes:

- Championing the corporate parenting role and function across the council with Members, officers and partner agencies
- Monitoring and overseeing plans, strategies or policies for looked after children, young people and care leavers to ensure performance and ambition is maintained
- Disseminate and discuss relevant policies and research pertinent to looked after children, young people and care leavers
- To monitor and review key performance indicators so that they are achieved
- To highlight areas of good practice as well as review complaints

- To ensure that looked after children, young people and care leavers are able to participate in decisions about their care and the shaping and delivery of future services and to report on this progress on an annual basis

In addition to the Executive Working Party, strategic and operational matters are governed by the Corporate Parenting Strategy Group.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy Group is chaired by the Assistant Director – Children’s Social Care. Other members of the Strategy Group are represented by lead professionals from agencies within Bromley and their partners. This includes the:

- Head of Service for Care and Resources
- Group Manager’s for Looked After Children and Care Leavers
- Group Manager for Fostering and Adoption
- Head Teacher – Bromley Virtual School
- Paediatric Health Advisor
- Public Health Consultant
- Operational Manager - CAMHS
- Group Manager – IRO Service
- Looked After Children’s Nurse
- Commissioning Manager for Looked After Children
- Lead Officer for Performance Improvement
- Active Involvement Officer
- Research and Statistics Manager
- Children’s Social Care Policy Officer

The purpose of the group is to develop the necessary work streams across all partner agencies.

Our vision and Priorities as Corporate Parents

Our Vision

Our vision underpinning the Bromley corporate parenting strategy is simple - we want our children and young people to have everything that good parents want for their children.

We want our looked after children and young people to work with us, along with their parents and carers, in shaping how we manage and organise the planning, resources and services that support and care for them.

We want our children and young people to be happy and healthy, both physically and emotionally, to be safe and protected from harm and exploitation, and to be supported each step of the way to adult life.

We want them to achieve their potential, especially at school, to make the most of the learning opportunities they are offered and to participate in the decisions affecting their care and their lives. This includes making the transition to adulthood with continuity of support, access to good jobs and higher education, while living in good housing and being financially secure.

Our Strategic Priorities for 2014 – 2016

Our priorities are to ensure:

- Securing permanency for looked after children at the earliest opportunity
- Improve placement stability and the number of moves children and young people experience
- Improve the involvement of children and young people in shaping services that positively enhance their care plans to improve their life chances
- Develop commissioning arrangements to promote good outcomes and achieve best value
- Improve education outcomes and ensure that young people have access to education, employment or training post statutory education
- Celebrate and value our looked after children's achievements, to build self confidence and esteem

- Ensure that children and young people have timely access to a range of appropriate services that support their health needs, including emotional and mental health needs
- Enhance elected Member and officer involvement in delivering the strategic priorities

Involving Looked After Children and Young People in Shaping and Delivering Services

Listening to Looked After Children Young People and Care Leavers:

Bromley Council is committed to listening and taking account of the views of the children we work with to make sure that their views influence how services are planned. Whilst there has been limited success in consulting with our looked after children and young people we aim to strengthen this area of work in 2014/15.

The work programme for the active involvement officer will be reviewed to increase the range and type of activities that can harness the wider views of all of our looked after children in a systematic way. The Corporate Parenting Strategy Group will take responsibility for identifying areas for research and collate the information to improve service development and delivery.

The Living in Care Council (LinCC)

We acknowledge and welcome that the views of our children and young people in care and care leavers play a crucial role in the range of services that we deliver to support them reach their full potential. The Living in Care Council has been established to act as a vehicle that brings together the voice of our looked after children as well as a group that can actively assist with the design and development of services and resources.

Membership of the Living in Council is open to all looked after children, young people and care leavers.

The Living in Care Council will continue to be a key group in assisting the Council in delivering its corporate parenting objectives. The group will undertake specific tasks and projects on behalf of all our looked after children and young people and continue to represent Bromley at various national forums.

Work will be undertaken in 2014/15 to strengthen and increase the size of the living in care council so that it is more representative of the general looked after population.

Involving Children and Young People

We understand that there will be some looked after children, young people and care leavers who do not wish to commit to being part of the living in care council due to other commitments or interests they may have but who would like to contribute to service design or delivery in a different way. We will continue to train and support young people so that they can contribute to recruitment and staff selection, and to deliver training and information to prospective foster carers. In addition, we will explore further opportunities for children and young people to be involved in specific activities that promotes their needs to the widest possible audience of partners involved in delivering services for and on behalf of them.

Total Respect

The Total Respect training programme is a course aimed at staff and others who work with looked after children, young people and care leavers to help them understand and acknowledge the importance of a child's right to participate in the decisions and plans that affect their lives and the services they receive.

We aim to introduce this programme during 2014/15.

The training programme will be delivered by a group of looked after young people and care leavers with the support of an active involvement officer following comprehensive training.

In addition, we will consider how children and young people can develop and deliver additional training to assist with a greater understanding of what 'corporate parenting' means and entails.

Delivering the Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Corporate Parenting Strategy Group will be responsible for ensuring that policy and strategy are turned into service delivery. The group is overseen by children's social care and is made up of key representatives from partner agencies.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy Group will ensure that the roles, function and contributions of individual stakeholders are widely understood to deliver the strategy.

The principle objectives of the group are:

- To develop and promote a range of resources and opportunities available from or wealth of community networks to promote and develop our looked after children and care leavers;
- To develop and monitor a comprehensive work programme to develop practice and take forward service development to promote the outcomes and opportunities for our looked after children and care leavers;
- To develop a corporate parenting training programme for Elected Members to understand and develop their roles and responsibilities as corporate parents;
- To collate emerging issues and feedback to relevant management teams to support service development

Elected Members

All Elected Members have to ensure that public services used or required by children and young people in care are of a high quality, integrated and take account of need. They must ensure they are fully informed of the issues facing children in care by understanding their characteristics and by knowing how well services are performing in meeting their assessed needs. This requires an awareness and understanding of:

- Care and placement arrangements
- Child protection and safety policies and procedures
- Education performance and achievements in school
- Further and Higher Education, training and employment achievements
- Responsiveness of health services
- Preparation for leaving care arrangements and housing needs
- Arrangements to prevent children in care from getting into trouble
- Elected Member participation in the fostering and adoption panels

Elected Members will be supported in meeting their responsibilities by relevant council officers. They will provide leadership that will encourage and support partnership and joined-up working. This will ensure that funding, commissioning and priority setting deliver the best combination of services for children and young people in care and care leavers.

Senior Managers

The Council's senior management team will ensure that the needs of our looked after children are actively considered when shaping and delivering council services. Senior Managers also have a responsibility to ensure that the ambitions and commitment to the needs of our looked after children are fully articulated and acted upon.

Foster Carers

Foster Carers will be assessed, approved on an annual basis, supervised and supported to ensure that they:

- Provide a safe, secure and comfortable home for the children and young people they care for
- Give children and young people time and attention and clear boundaries
- Provide encouragement and motivation to help children and young people meet their potential
- Work positively with birth parents and other family members where appropriate
- Work in partnership with those who share responsibility for the child or young person's care, welfare and development
- Provide care that supports and promotes the child or young person's culture, race, religion, language, disability and sexual orientation.

This will apply equally to all carers including Bromley in-house foster carers, Independent Fostering Agency foster carers and children's residential social care staff.

Social Workers and other social care staff should:

- Ensure that each child and young person's needs are thoroughly assessed and that these are properly represented in their Care and Pathway Plans.
- Have the key role in care planning for children and young people in care and care leavers. First consideration will be given to returning the child or young person to their parents or other family members care when safe to do so. Where this is not achievable efforts will be made to secure the child with an alternative family such as adoption or foster care. Where a child or young person remains in care plans will also address leaving care arrangements.
- Listen to the views and wishes of the child or young person and those of their family members where appropriate. The views of those involved in providing services to children in care will also be sought.
- Ensure each child or young person is healthy and their health needs are appropriately assessed and met.
- Ensure each child or young person is safely and securely accommodated within formalised family arrangements or in appropriate care placements
- Ensure they have access to and are supported in a full range of educational services, whether this is in schools, colleges or specialist alternative provision

- Ensure they have access to leisure and sports facilities which enable their interests, skills confidence and self esteem to develop.
- Ensure that they make a smooth and successful transition from living in care to adulthood.

The Virtual School

The Virtual School for Children in Care is responsible for providing strategic direction and targeted support and securing successful educational outcomes for all children and young people in care and will:

- Support children and young people in care in School Years 1-13 which will include working with carers, Social Workers, Schools, Special Educational Needs, other Council teams and external agencies
- Monitor performance of educational attainment at Key Stages 2, 4 and 5 and the statutory completion of Personal Education Plans
- Facilitate Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings
- Monitor and report on admissions, attendance and exclusions of children and young people in care
- Commission home tuition
- Provide transitional support over school summer holidays for those children moving from primary to secondary school
- Provide training for carers and for Designated Teachers
- and above all, improve the educational attainment of children and young people in care.

Teachers and Education Staff

All staff working in education, whether based in maintained schools, academies, free schools or local authority services have responsibilities towards children and young people in care. These responsibilities are clearly defined in the 'The Education of Young People in Public Care (DoH/DfES, 2000) and Statutory Guidance on the Duty on Local Authorities to Promote the Education of Looked After Children under Section 52 of the Children Act 2004' (DfES 2005). These responsibilities cover the following range of activities:

- Admissions to schools
- School transport
- Special Educational Needs and Inclusion
- School Improvement
- School Exclusions
- Education Welfare
- Educational Psychology
- Educational Support to Schools

The statutory duty does not directly apply to schools and their staff but there is an expectation that schools and their staff will 'take a proactive approach to co-operating with and supporting local authorities in discharging this duty' (DfES 2005). It is a statutory duty that all schools have an allocated Designated Teacher for Children in Care in post.

Health Sector Managers and Clinicians

The "Children Act 2008 - Promoting Health for Children in Care Guidance" sets out the responsibilities that health workers have towards children and young people in care. Chief Executives of NHS Trusts are charged with ensuring that health sector children's services are planned, commissioned and delivered in collaboration with other partner agencies, taking account of the particular health needs of children and young people in care and that priority is given to them. These are achieved by:

- Statutory guidance for Local Authorities and Primary Care/NHS Trusts
- A Designated Paediatrician and Specialist Nurse at Consultant level for children in care
- Practitioner nurses for both younger children in care and 16+ care leavers
- Initial and regular comprehensive health assessments (6 monthly for 0-4's, annually for 5-17's)
- A health plan with clear and comprehensive assessment of need, allocation of responsibility and expected timescale for action tailored to meet the individual needs of the child and young person in place for the first Child in Care Review
- Targeted health promotion services are in place and clear and effective systems for children and young people placed out of area
- Annual measurement by carer of emotional and behavioural health indicators for 4 – 16 yr olds using 'Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire'. Where required follow up support from Educational Psychologist and CAMHS
- Strategic and service improvements to access to services such as CAMHS, sexual health, drugs/alcohol advice
- Effective information sharing across agencies ensures consistency in meeting the needs of children and young people
- A sexual health and substance misuse screening process forms part of the health assessment with young people and the 16+ nurse can provide outreach contraceptive services as required.
- An assessment and referral toolkit, 'You and Sex' has been developed and all young people over 13 years will be screened annually and provided with appropriate intervention.
- Accurate and prompt assessment of need with clear plans to address deficits in health & full health history gathering
- Working with carers and colleagues to build upon children's strengths and resilience factors

Conclusion

There is no single or simple answer to improving outcomes for all children and young people in care and care leavers and there is a need for thorough knowledge of the characteristics of the care population and a range of appropriate strategies. Our aim must be to ensure that our care and support and commitment to securing improved outcomes for children and young people in care and care leavers becomes fully and permanently embedded in the culture of children's and all council and its partner's services. There are few other specific issues of higher priority for the local authority than caring for the children and young people for which the London Borough of Bromley has a degree of parental responsibility.

Evaluation and Review of the Strategy

This strategy will be presented to the Executive Working Party for Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting in Autumn 2014 and will then be disseminated to all stakeholders. It will be evaluated and reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Strategy Board with the participation of children and young people in care and care leavers. The strategy will be further evaluated and monitored over the next 12 months and a progress review report will be made to the Executive Working Party for Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting in Spring 2015.

Appendix One

Our Guiding Principles in Delivering the Strategy

In developing our strategy we have identified nine underlying principles for our looked after children and young people:

- We will only promise you things that we know we can do and we will ensure that you know who is responsible for delivering these promises. If these promises are broken there will be a line of accountability which will end with the Portfolio Holder for Care Services and the Chair of the Living in Care Council.
- We aim to be good parents and will care for you as an individual.
- We will take account of your particular needs, especially those relating to disability, race, culture, religion and sexuality.
- We will take account of anything that is leading to you being treated unfairly and will give you support to overcome it, including anyone treating you unfairly because you are in care.
- We will always involve you in the decision we take for you at a level appropriate to your understanding. We will respect your right to make choices about your life. Our first priority will always be to make sure you are safe.
- You will have the opportunity to talk to your social worker alone every time he/she visits you.
- We want you to be healthy, safe, have fun and gain achievements for yourself. We want you to have stability in your life, to make a positive contribution to your community and to leave care able to make your way successfully in life. We will support you to achieve all this.
- We will have expectations of you as well and we will make these clear to you
- We will listen to you as individuals and as a group and we want you to tell us when you meet us whether we are keeping our promises.
- We will ensure that you receive your full set of rights, as set out in relevant legislation, regulations and guidance and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Placements - Standard Promises

As well as developing our underlying principles to support our work with you we have also developed some standard placement promises that every placement provider is required to sign up to.

Staying safe

We promise to:

- talk to you about safety and staying safe
- try our best to get to know who your friends are and who you spend time with
- actively try to locate you and contact you if you are missing

- encourage you to listen to and respect the views of others – this will sometimes mean challenging you
- make time to listen to you and talk to you
- encourage positive interaction and ways to bond
- nurture and care for you in placement

Staying healthy

We promise to:

- undertake discussions around sexual health/safe sex if required
- support you to make wise decisions about your life
- have an up to date appreciation of what matters to you
- be aware of your emotional health and be sensitive towards your needs
- take you to all medical appointments
- provide healthy food and snack options and encourage you to maintain a healthy lifestyle
- be as practically available for you as we can
- treat you in the same way as if you were our own children

Enjoying and achieving

We promise to:

- help with your homework
- let you have friends visit during acceptable hours after discussion and agreement
- find out about local groups and projects and support you to participate if you want to
- engage you in conversations about your aspirations: what you want your life to be like when you grow up

Making a positive contribution

We promise to:

- make every effort to give you information about the local community and to encourage you to participate
- encourage your awareness and appreciation of your cultural and ethnic background
- explore voluntary projects and support others to work positively with you and make a positive contribution
- help with the development of independence skills through practical and emotional support

Achieving economic well being

We promise to:

- open bank accounts and explain the importance of saving
- involve you in the family chores around the house to teach you independence skills
- help you draw up a budget each month so you do not have debts