

# Corporate Parenting Strategy

2023 - 2025



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# Foreword



When I was elected as a ward councillor in 2018, one of the training courses for new councillors I attended was Corporate Parenting. I'd never heard the term before, I went along and was absolutely blown away by what I learned that day. What a responsibility this was. I was a mum of 3 and a granny of 6 and all of a sudden, I was a corporate parent to several hundred children who were being cared for by Sefton Council.

In May 2021, I joined Cabinet as Lead Member for Children's Social Care. I have the great privilege of chairing the Corporate Parenting Board. I hear directly from our care experienced young people how the care they have received from us has shaped their lives.

I have huge ambitions for all the children and young people we care for in Sefton. I want them to grow up knowing that we care about them and believe in them. Where they can aim for the sky, and we help them get there. Where their voices are listened to and acted upon. Where there is no limit to their ambition and aspirations. Where they can have hopes and dreams and laughter and love in their lives. This is what being a corporate parent means to me.

## Councillor Mhairi Doyle.

Lead Member Children's Social Care - Sefton Council



# Introduction

## What is Corporate Parenting

'Corporate Parenting' is the term that is used to describe the responsibilities that a local authority or council has when a child or young person can no longer be looked after by their parent(s) or family. A Court will have decided that it is in a child's best interest for this to happen.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 states that a Local Authority is the Corporate Parent of Cared For and Care Experienced children and young people. It should act in the best interests of these children and young people; keeping them safe; promoting their physical and mental wellbeing, encouraging them to express their views, wishes and feelings. It should make sure that they live in stable homes, have consistent education or training, and healthy relationships. It should have high aspirations for children and help them prepare for adulthood and independent living.

Statutory Guidance to the Act (2018) states that the role that councils play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. It describes the 'unique responsibility' councils have towards these children and defines a simple and critical question for Corporate Parents to ask when considering matters affecting Cared For and Care Experienced children and young people –

***“Would this be good enough for my child?”***

The Guidance goes on to stress that all elected members and officers of a council should share corporate parenting responsibilities towards Cared For and Care Experienced children and young people. A test of the strength of a Corporate Parenting approach is that these responsibilities are a priority for everyone, both elected members and officers, and all are concerned about Cared For and Care Experienced children and young people –

***“As if they were their own.”***

## Why do we have a Corporate Parenting Strategy?

This Strategy ensures we deliver the best outcomes for the children and young people we care for. We are committed to making sure that every child has the best possible start in life, is given help to achieve their potential, and has a safe and positive experience with us as their Corporate Parent. Our children come to be cared for by us due to a variety of reasons, and at all ages from 0-18 years; this strategy is for all Cared For and Care Experienced children and young people.

## Corporate Parenting Principles

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 set out seven corporate parenting principles to which councils should have regard in exercising their responsibilities to cared for and care experienced children and young people:

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 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.
7. To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living

These principles are not new requirements, but rather describe a way of embedding a positive culture in local authorities and provide a framework which helps local authorities understand and comply with their duties to these young people. Sefton Council welcomes and supports these principles and aims and is determined that Officers, Carers and Elected members act according to the principles in their corporate parenting roles.

# Sefton's Vision

Our vision is:

*To be the best corporate parents we can be, working together to provide children and young people in our care with happy and healthy childhoods, helping them reach and exceed their potential and aspirations, and supporting them into successful adulthood.*

The values we bring to help us realise our vision are:

- We must be the strongest champions of, and advocates for, all our cared for and care experienced children and young people.
- We should have positive regard for all cared for and care experienced children and young people and make sure that all are nurtured, feel loved and supported.
- Cared For and Care Experienced children and young people are 'our' children and young people, and we must have strong ambitions and aim high for all.
- All our young people are individuals and unique and we must parent each child as such.
- We must build trusting relationships with our children and young people so they feel able to give us their views and can talk to us about their wishes and feelings, their anxieties and hopes.
- We must listen to our children and young people and take account of their views on all matters which affect them.
- We must be resilient and persistent parents with an uncompromising approach to doing the best for our children and young people and a willingness to 'go the extra mile'.
- We want to continuously improve as Corporate Parents and continuously improve outcomes for our young people.
- Our vision for our children aligns to the Children and Young Peoples plan (2020-2025). We maximize the health and wellbeing of all our children and young people living in Sefton, through the themes of safe, heard, happy, healthy, achieving.

## Our Corporate Parenting Priorities

Taking account of the seven corporate parenting principles and the promise we have made to our young people in the Sefton Pledge, we have established 5 working groups to drive forward the key priorities identified in collaboration with our children and young people. The working groups report directly to the Corporate Parenting Board. Each board meeting is 'themed' as outlined below.

Our priorities are set out below with the actions we will take to address them.

### **Being Heard – Working Group Chair: Participation Officer.**

The young person's voice must be at the centre of our approach to corporate parenting. We want mutually respectful and collaborative relationships with our children and young people. This means embedding a culture of fully involving young people in all matters affecting them, welcoming, and encouraging their participation, actively listening to and genuinely taking account of their views. We will:

- Involve all cared for and care experienced children and young people, subject to their age and understanding, in any assessment, plan or review in respect of their own lives and upbringing.
- Support young people to express their views in meetings such as child protection conferences, cared for statutory reviews, pathway planning meetings and in their care placements.
- Provide advocates and supporters to help young people's views to be heard in these settings.
- Regularly ask the views of children and young people on their experience of our care.
- Ensure that messages from the Children in Care Councils are widely disseminated to officers and elected members and that responses are provided consistently.
- Members of the Corporate Parenting Board and senior managers will routinely offer to attend meetings of the Children in Care Councils and to take opportunities to meet, talk to and be with young people at events such as awaydays, celebration events and parties.
- Offer training on young people's participation to council officers, carers and elected members.

### **Safe and Stable homes – Working Group Chair: Service Manager. Fostering & Adoption.**

We will ensure all children and young people have a safe and stable home environment. Our children have a very diverse range of needs and having a wide range of placements is essential to meet those different needs – the lack of placement choice can be an issue for social workers and young people alike. As young people move towards independence, we also need a wide variety of supported, semi-independent placements and permanent housing options for our young people.



## We will

- Always seek to enable cared for children to live with extended family or kinship members when possible. Where this is not possible fostering should be a first option.
- Recognise that residential care may be a positive choice for some young people.
- Maintain our strong focus on recruiting more in-house foster carers investing strongly in their support and training and validating the contribution they make to our corporate parenting.
- Strive to place our children with providers rated as 'outstanding' or 'good'.
- All children to be placed in regulated or registered provision.
- Seek to minimise the number of placement moves children may experience, especially those which are unplanned.
- Ensure all children and young people, where possible, are placed in Sefton.
- Develop and gather key data in relation to internal and external placement provision.
- Ensure all placements have robust care plans and Individual placement agreements in place.
- Seek to provide the offer of 'staying put', to young people 18-21yrs old living with foster carers subject to their wishes.
- Work with social housing and third sector organisations to commission and provide a range of supported semi-independent accommodation and permanent housing options for our care experienced young people.

## **Raising Aspirations – Working Group Chair: Head Teacher. Virtual School.**

We will ensure our children receive the best possible education and reach their potential, recognising children have different and varying needs. We want all our young people to enjoy and achieve in their schools, be able to access further and higher education if they wish or high-quality apprenticeships and training with increasingly good prospects for employment as adults.

## We will:

- Work with our carers and social workers to increase their ambition and support for the educational outcomes of all our cared for and care experienced children and young people.
- Work with the Virtual School to be the strongest advocates for children's education in their dealings with individual schools and local authorities.
- Ensure that all children of or approaching school age have an individual personal education plan reviewed regularly and updated.
- Ensure that any cared for child or young person with special educational needs or disabilities has a comprehensive education, health and care plan.
- Work with schools to make best use of Pupil Premium entitlement to promote the educational outcomes of individual cared for children.
- Always seek to enable children to remain in the schools they were attending when they come into our care.



- Strive to reduce the number of changes of school experienced by cared for children.
- Always look to place our cared for children in schools rated by Ofsted as 'good' or better.
- Work closely with schools and carers to support a child's transition to a new school setting.
- Ensure a constant focus on school attendance and exclusions of children, keeping to a minimum the time our children are out of school.
- Work with further education providers, employers, district and borough councils and other public sector partners to expand the post 16 education, training and employment offer which can be accessed by older cared for and care experienced young people.

### **Health and Wellbeing – Working Group Chair: Designated Nurse Children in Care. NHS Cheshire and Merseyside (Sefton).**

We must provide all our children with good routine healthcare, making sure that they access more specialist treatment when necessary. Many cared for children will have experienced trauma through neglect or abuse in their earlier lives and some will experience trauma whilst in our care. We will

- Ensure that every child has a timely, initial health assessment on becoming cared for which is reviewed at least annually.
- Ensure that our carers promote healthy lifestyles and understand both the physical and the emotional or mental health needs of our children, as well as health needs arising from 'risky' behaviours such as substance misuse.
- Provide support and consultation to carers and residential staff in respect of caring for children and young people with challenging health needs.
- Improve completion of emotional wellbeing form (SDQ's) for new to care and for those children and young people placed out of borough.
- Work with our partners to provide access to emotional and mental health support and services.

### **Transition and preparation for Adulthood – Working Group Chair: Service Manager. Cared For and Care Experienced Young People.**

Moving on from care is a critical time for our young people and supporting them through this transition into adulthood is a responsibility for us as all.

We need to understand that young people develop at different paces and that some young people will struggle to gain independence and struggle in independence. We need to be there for them and support them through this journey.

## We will

- Ensure that all young people in our care over the age of 16yrs have a pathway plan specific to their needs and aspirations and an allocated personal advisor.
- Ensure that all pathway plans have a specific focus on care experienced young people being able to access suitable accommodation and education, employment, or training.
- Expect our foster carers and residential homes to provide opportunities for young people to develop independent living skills appropriate to their age and stage.
- Provide financial support, grants (eg setting up home) and other forms of financial relief to care experienced young people in line with our financial assistance policies.
- Fully support any young person who wishes to pursue higher education to obtain places and apply for student loans. We will look at funding accommodation for young people who wish to seek higher education as necessary.
- Continue our work with further education colleges, employment training providers to help young people access high quality training and apprenticeships.
- As a council provide internship, apprenticeship, and employment opportunities for our cared for and care experienced children and young people.



## Children and Young People's Voices

Currently we have over 600 children cared for in Sefton and it is important that we listen to and hear their voices. To do this the council employ a full-time participation officer to support and develop the children in care councils for children and young people of all ages to be actively involved in decisions around their lives.

The role of the children in care council is to act as the voice for every cared for and care experienced children and young person, to influence decisions made regarding their future and to give everyone the chance to shape and influence the parenting they receive whilst in care.

## Youth Ambassadors. 11yrs to 15yrs

The members of the Youth Ambassadors group meet twice a month and use their own lived experiences to support the development of support and services for all cared for children and young people in Sefton. The group are regularly involved in staff interview panels, development of practice standards and host a number of activity-based events throughout the year that are open to all our children and young people.

## Making A Difference. 16yrs plus

The Making A Difference group is a collective of young people aged 16yrs plus who are cared for or care experienced. The group meet twice monthly to support the council in the development of services and support for all Sefton children and young people who have experience of being in care. Members provide training for social care staff and foster carers as well as students studying for social work degrees. Members of the group also sit on the Sefton Corporate Parenting Board.

Members of both groups meet routinely with members of the Sefton Corporate Parenting Board.

## Corporate Parenting Board

It is the role of the Corporate Parenting Board to monitor the key priorities and outcomes for Cared For and Care Experienced children and young people. The Board is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care who will champion and monitor the Corporate Parenting strategy and help drive its implementation. The Board consists of cross-party members and Senior managers who meet bi-monthly, receive reports, including performance reports, undertake strategic and thematic enquiries into specific elements of the strategy and seek ways of resolving barriers to its success. The membership and terms of reference for the panel will be reviewed regularly to ensure partner agencies are appropriately represented.

Collectively and individually, Board members will engage regularly with children, young people, staff and carers to help their understanding of issues affecting their lives.

The Corporate Parenting Board will also receive regular performance reports on the following data indicators which will help members to monitor the progress of work undertaken by the service.

- Entries into care, exits from care and length of time in care.
- Placement categories.
- Young people in care going missing.
- Young people in care at risk of exploitation.
- Proportion of care experienced in education, employment, and training.



## Corporate Parenting Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member in ensuring that the Council fulfils its role as an effective Corporate Parent was highlighted by the publication of 'Statutory Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services. (DfE April 2013).

Whilst the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member have specific roles and responsibilities as previously outlined, every council Senior Officer and every Elected Member has Corporate Parenting responsibilities, and it is therefore incumbent upon them all:

- To listen to our cared for and care experienced children and young people.
- To work in partnership with cared for and care experienced children and young people to improve services and support for all children and young people in care.
- To ensure that the commitments outlined in the Sefton Pledge are delivered.
- To ensure that the Sefton Local Offer clearly outlines support and services available to all Sefton care experienced young people.
- To provide leadership across the authority in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of our cared for children and young people.
- To understand the impact of all council decisions on cared for and care experienced children and young people.
- To ensure that governance arrangements are in place to implement any decisions regarding children and young people across the authority and partner agencies.
- To have access to both qualitative and quantitative information on the service and to evaluate this information.
- To ensure that the strategic plans of the local authority and joint plans with partner agencies address the needs of our cared for and care experienced children and young people.
- To keep up to date with emerging research findings and new initiatives that should inform the direction of services.

