

Family Services

Document control

Document title	Corporate Parenting Strategy 2016 - 20
Document description	The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out our key principles and priorities to improve the outcomes for children in care by the building of their resilience, aspirations and independence as they move through care into adulthood
Document author	

Version control

Document production date	19 January 2017
Document currency	

Clearance process

Quality approver	Date
Jo Pymont	
Release approver	Date
Chris Munday	

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Foreword

At the heart of our vision for Family Friendly Barnet is the concept of Resilient Families and Resilient Children. We have high aspirations for, and expectations of, the children in our corporate care and want them to be able to confidently say *“I have, I can, I am”*.

In 1998 the Secretary of State for Health, Frank Dobson, wrote to all local authority councilors reminding them that they were ultimately responsible for the quality of care for children their care. Corporate parenting relates to all children in care, wherever they are placed, including young people receiving after care services up to, in some circumstances, 25 years of age.

Corporate Parenting is about offering at least the same standards of care as would a ‘reasonable parent’ in respect of the children in the care of the Local Authority. Children who enter the care system can have a range of disadvantages arising from their early life experiences and it is the duty of the corporate parent to make every effort to ensure that children in care are given the opportunity and support to develop into happy and successful adults.

The thrust of corporate parenting is about improving the life chances of children in care, by protecting their welfare, promoting their wellbeing, and helping them reach their full potential. Children’s identity and sense of belonging is central to the care planning and service development. This means that for children in care and care leavers *all* aspects of their wellbeing, aspirations and learning should be promoted and assured.

Historically, outcomes for children who have been in care have been comparatively poor compared to their peers. Research has shown that, as adults, they do less well educationally; they are over represented in the criminal justice system; have poorer health outcomes including an increased risk of suffering from mental health difficulties; have an increased likelihood of becoming homeless and experience economic and relationships difficulties in their own families.

The National Context

Corporate Parenting is used to describe the duties and responsibilities of a local authority in respect of the children in care to that authority. Parental responsibility for looked after children is the responsibility of the whole Local Authority not just the Family Services division. In addition the local authority must enlist the support of its partner agencies in helping to fulfill their corporate parenting responsibilities in respect of those children in the Local Authority's care.

The Children Act 1989 sets out the local authority's legal duties and responsibilities which underpin service provision for children in care and care leavers. Although the term "Corporate Parenting" is not specifically mentioned in the Children Act 1989 it is a term that has been widely adopted and is included in the recent guidance associated with the Act.

Subsequent legislation, regulations and government advice has extended and strengthened the obligations of local authorities towards children in care, including:-

- Letter from the Secretary of State for Health, Frank Dobson in 1998 regarding councillors' roles and responsibilities towards children in care
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 - extended the types of service and upper age limit of young people the local authority is responsible for as a corporate parent to 24 (subsequently extended to 25)
- Further government guidance issued for councillors has reiterated the role that they should play in being an effective corporate parent for children in their care. The "If this were my child" (DfES 2003) guidance posed the benchmark question to develop the necessary mind set for achieving high quality outcomes for children in care. Children Act 2004 - contains a statutory requirement for local authorities to promote the educational achievement of children in care and emphasizes the role of collaborative service agreements with other agencies to achieve the right type of service provision.
- Children & Young People Act 2008 - reinforced the message that all local authorities, and particularly elected members, hold responsibility for ensuring good outcomes for children in care. It also made explicit the responsibility of local authorities to secure sufficient accommodation for children in care within their area which meets their needs.

More recently in April 2011, further statutory guidance was introduced to clarify the local authority's responsibilities for children in care and produced a suite of documents to set out the responsibilities.

In April 2013 The Care Inquiry published 'Making not Breaking; Building Relationships' for our most vulnerable children. It concluded that 'permanence' for children means 'security, stability, love and a strong sense of identity and belonging' and reinforced that the quality of relationships with the people who care for and are around them is fundamental.

In the Children and Social Work Bill 2016/17 the Government has reaffirmed its plans to enable a child to be adopted by a new family in a shorter period of

time, improve the standards of social work, and give greater support for children leaving care through a new 'Care Leavers' Covenant'. The bill opens with a list of standards for how local authorities should better act as a 'corporate parent' to support children in care as they move into adulthood.

The principles are applicable to all local authorities in England, whether or not they are or were the local authorities looking after the child.

The "Care Leavers Covenant" announced the Queen's Speech will require local authorities to consult on and publish a 'local offer' to care leavers setting out all the services that they are entitled to. This is similar to that required of local authorities for children with special educational needs after the Children and Families Act 2014.

The proposed legislation extends the right to a Personal Adviser, someone who will make sure care leavers receive the support they need as they transition into adulthood, to every care leaver that wants one up to the age of 25.

All schools must appoint individuals who hold responsibility for helping care leavers, adopted children and children in special guardianship orders, to achieve positive educational outcomes. There is a duty on the schools in England to designate a member of staff at the school to have responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of certain previously looked after pupils.

There is also an additional duty on LAs and schools to support the educational achievement of adopted children and those in the care of guardians. Prospective adopters with whom a child is placed will be given the same rights as birth parents in adoption order hearings. The Bill is currently being debated in the House of Commons.

Local context

In Barnet we want the same things for the children and young people in our care as any good parent would want for their child. We want our children to be resilient and by that we mean healthy and happy in childhood, to feel valued for who they are and to feel loved. It is important that they benefit from their experience in school and enjoy learning. We want them to grow into well adjusted, resilient, emotionally balanced individuals who will experience positive relationships, be responsible citizens, fulfill their goals and ambitions and ultimately provide good parenting to their own children.

Within our resilience philosophy for children in care and care leavers we want them to be able to say;

I have...

- People around me I trust and who love me, no matter what
- A safe and comfortable place to live
- I have a job and a place at college/university, or an apprenticeship
- People who set limits for me so I know when to stop before there is danger or trouble
- People who aim high for me and who will guide me in the right direction
- Access to services that support my cultural and ethnic identity

- Access to services that support me when I am not able to live independently due to my disability or special need
- A voice that is heard by all those who work to support me
- People who can help me connect with my birth family and understand my story
- People who can support me to make safe choices in relationships
- People who want me to learn to do things on my own
- People who help me if I become a parent
- People who can support me with my health needs

I am...

- Supported to make the right choice
- Successful in my job or training
- Happy with my relationships
- Supported to understand why I came into care and can avoid past mistakes
- Able to contribute to services for other care leavers to make their experience better
- Willing to be responsible for what I do
- Safe with those who care for me
- A willing contributor to my transition plan as a care leaver

I can...

- Talk to others about things that frighten or bother me
- Find ways to solve problems that I face
- Control myself when I feel like doing something not right or dangerous
- Figure out when it is a good time to talk to someone or to take action
- Find someone to help me when I need it
- Contribute to my care plan and attend my reviews
- Contact my SW, IRO, PA or advocate when I need to, to help me to cope
- Talk to my chosen professional about how I feel
- Contribute to my life story journey
- Say what I would like to do in the future
- Have a choice about where I would like to live
- Undertake some tasks to help to live independently in the future

In Barnet the number of looked after children has remained relatively stable over the past 5 years, with a similar inflow and outflow each year. However, at 352, this is now at the highest it has been in 6 years and is not in line with population growth. Barnet has seen significant increase in UASC numbers with referrals rising from 46 (2014/15) to 61 (2015/16).

<i>Numbers of LAC as at 31st March 2016</i>	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Barnet 0-18 population	89,193	90,298	91,655	91,021	92,610
Numbers of LAC	300	305	310	305	315
Children starting to be looked after	155	170	170	175	180
Children ceasing to be looked after	165	170	170	185	175

Rate of looked after children per 10k under 18 population, 2012-2016					
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
England	59	60	60	60	60
Outer London	49	48	48	47	47
Inner London	70	66	64	60	56
Barnet	36	36	36	34	35

There was a notably higher proportion of children aged 16+ in Barnet's care compared to the national average (+9%) but the rate is in line with overall London figures and is likely to reflect the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) placed within London and issues of youth homelessness within the capital. The response to UASCs (16+) has been to place them in semi-independent provision but with the numbers increasing this is becoming more challenging.

In Barnet, the ethnic breakdown for children looked after has varied little since 2011. Nationally and in Barnet, the highest number of LAC are from a white British background. Barnet's percentage of white LAC is significantly lower than England's however this is in line with Barnet's population.

The percentage of mixed ethnicity LAC is significantly higher in Barnet than it is nationally; they are also disproportionately represented compared to the Barnet population of mixed ethnicity 0-19 year olds (10.6%).

There has been an increase in young people placed on remand in 2016 and Barnet is implementing a new approach with the REACH team to respond to the serious youth violence and gang culture that is growing within the borough.

Corporate Parenting

Corporate Parenting involves the whole local authority. Schools, Parks, Libraries, Housing and Cultural and Leisure activities are important in enriching the lives of the children in care. This strategy applies to both the commissioners and the providers of services for children in care.

The Director of children's services (DCS) and the Lead Member for children's services hold particular responsibility for children in care. The DCS has a professional responsibility for children's services and the Lead Member holds political responsibility. Together the Director and Lead Member provide a clear and unambiguous top line of accountability for children's wellbeing. They should have a complementary working relationship and report to the Chief Executive and Local Authority leader who between them have overall responsibility to ensure the needs of all children in care are reflected across the whole local authority and local strategic partnership.

All councillors assume the role of Corporate Parent and have a duty to:-

1. Ensure that they know how the Local Authority performs in respect of the key national indicators for children in care and leaving care.
2. Champion the rights of children in care and care leavers, through their links in the community and directly through their other roles for example, as school governors.
3. Ensure that there are effective mechanisms for the voice of children in care and care leavers to be heard and to influence strategy.
4. Ensure that the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel progresses the strategic priorities.
5. Ensure that the allocation of resources is adequate to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers.

In partnership with the local authority, schools, police, Health, the voluntary sector, faith groups and the local community all need to deliver on the corporate parenting pledge to children in care and care leavers.

In Barnet the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel, chaired by the Lead member, provides strategic leadership to ensure that the council delivers on our priorities and corporate parenting duties, working effectively with partners to achieve the best outcome for children in care and care leavers.

As Corporate Parents we adopt the principles of Barnet Family Services Resilience Philosophy. All involved with children in care recognise that in order to build a strong platform for onward transition to adulthood, there needs to be a cohesive approach which is underpinned by strong values and a resilient methodology. *Grotberg's (1995) "I have, I can, I am"* sets a good and firm foundation to ensure consistency across services around the children at the edge or in care and those leaving care.

Our Principles

1. Our vision for Family Friendly Barnet is founded on the concept of Resilient Families and Resilient Children. As corporate parents, we will strive to ensure that we provide a service that builds resilient children who can resist adversity, cope with uncertainty and recover more successfully from traumatic events and episodes.
2. Wherever possible we will endeavour to keep children within their families, but where it is not possible we will ensure that we deliver on our pledge to children in care and seek to make a difference in the outcomes for their lives
3. The responsibility for children in care or at risk of coming into care rests across all of children services and partner agencies.
4. The impact of all intervention into a child's life should be measured, build resilience, invite challenge and show commitment to the child through focussed care planning.
5. We will develop and use resilience based intervention with children and young people and their families and wherever possible the intervention will focus on reunification of children with their families.
6. Placements should be sufficiently local to enable children in care to remain in their communities, maintain their networks and minimise disruption to their lives.
7. Children in care should receive the best education provision available.
8. Children in care and care leavers are encouraged to have aspirations to achieve success and be ambitious for their futures.
9. Children in care have the opportunity to make their views known and be assured that their views influence both their individual plans and the shape of current and future services
10. We will celebrate the achievements of children in care in all aspects of their lives
11. Children in care and those leaving care will have their health and wellbeing responded to efficiently and with the appropriate level of professional expertise.

Key strategic priorities for Corporate Parenting

Priority 1

To better promote the welfare and safeguarding of children in care and those on the edge of care

- We will work collaboratively with partner agencies to share information and develop a cross-cutting strategy around child sexual exploitation, missing children, gangs and domestic violence
- We will promote and embed resilience based practice across all service areas to ensure consistent purposeful social work practice that enhances and improves outcomes for children in care and leaving care

Barnet facts

Family services has developed a multidisciplinary REACH Team that will work with the high risk complex young people

Workforce development strategy aims to deliver on embedding resilience based practice

Priority 2

To improve the choice of placement through the Placement Commissioning Strategy

- We will increase recruitment of local foster carers to ensure greater choice of placements
- We will develop a new model of residential care through a redeveloped children's home
- We will re-procure provision of independent fostering agencies and residential placements to ensure best value for money
- We will ensure that provision of placements meets the changing needs of the children in

Barnet facts

40% of children in care are aged 10-14 years and 32% are over 16 years old.

Barnet has 107 in house foster carers

13% of children in care are in residential schools or children's homes

There are 122 children in local foster care and 63 in IFA placements

care population and options are creative and flexible

- We will ensure that the offer to the increasing number of UASC placed in Barnet is in line with their needs

Priority 3

To improve the involvement and impact of young people on the planning and evaluation of service design

- We will develop a role of corporate parenting champions amongst Council members
- We will strengthen the voice of the child through the VOTC strategic group
- We will broaden the opportunities for young people to contribute to and inform planning through the bi-annual survey for children in care and develop creative methods of engagement and communication
- We will ensure that The Pledge is implemented and understood by children and young people in care of Barnet

Barnet facts

96% of children in care participate in their reviews

In 2016 Barnet published a Pledge for children in care and care leavers that informs this strategy

The Voice of the Child Team has led on the development of the MOMO (Mind of your own) app

The VOTC Team together with the Children in care Council will review our pledge to the children

Priority 4

To improve the education attainment and aspirations of all children in care and leaving care

- We want all children in care to be able to access good quality education that provides the opportunity for high educational achievements and strong future aspirations

Barnet facts

92% of children in care attend an education provision that is good or outstanding

The percentage of care leavers who are NEET was 32% in 2016. This is a 7% decrease from previous year

Over 20 care leavers attend university and there are 2 young people accessing apprenticeships

- We will support 16+ year olds into further education, university or employment and enhance opportunities for apprenticeships
- We will make sure that children in care have access to independent information, advice and guidance to plan their futures

Priority 5

To improve the physical, social health and emotional wellbeing of children in care and care leavers

- We will work with the Clinical Commissioning Group and appropriate providers to ensure a comprehensive health offer for all children in care and care leavers
- We will work with commissioners and providers on the recommissioning of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- We will ensure that all children in care have access to a timely and appropriate initial health assessment

Barnet facts

95% of children in care have had health assessments but the timeliness and access to initial health assessments needs improvement

16 children in care have agreed tripartite funding for their placements