

Corporate Parenting Week Council resource pack



Introduction

Looking after other people's children is one of the most important things councils do. It is the responsibility of all councillors, not just the lead member for children's services and officers. However, corporate parenting should not just be about making sure the right boxes are ticked to fulfil a statutory duty. Children and young people in care are some of the most vulnerable people in society and often do not have the benefit of strong support networks others have through family and friends. Councils cannot replicate these in full, but we should fill a similar role as far as possible, by building relationships and making our parenting more human than corporate.

Outcomes for children and young people that are in, or have left, care remain stubbornly worse than for other children. They do not do as well at school, are less likely to go on to higher education, more likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) and are over-represented in youth offending institutions.

As corporate parents, we should not accept this as inevitable, but strive to close this gap as far as we possibly can. We should have higher ambitions for children in care; listen to them, help them raise their aspirations and encourage others to open up more opportunities for them so that they can realise their full potential. In other words, do the kinds of things parents would do for their own children.

Corporate Parenting Week will be running from **25 June to 1 July 2012**. It will be a week of local and national activity highlighting the importance of this work and an opportunity to promote local action. I know that many councils already do a lot of fantastic work to support children and young people in their care. Corporate Parenting Week is an opportunity to build on it, share it and spread it across the country. I would encourage councillors to talk to colleagues locally about how you and your council can get involved.

This pack contains some suggestions for local activities, but I know there will be many bright ideas and other activities out there that are not captured. We are keen to hear about your corporate parenting work and plans so that we can promote and share all the good practice going on across the country. You can get in touch by emailing us at children@local.gov.uk.



Councillor David Simmonds

Chair, LGA Children and Young People Board

Why should my council get involved?

Corporate Parenting Week provides an opportunity for:

- councillors to find out more about their role in corporate parenting and get involved in local activities
- sharing ideas and good practice across the country
- showcasing the achievements of looked after children and young people in your area
- talking to looked after children and young people about their views on your services and how they could be improved
- recruiting people to come forward and foster or adopt in your area.

What else will be going on?

The main focus of the week will be what is going on in local areas across the country and there is a section at the end of this pack which suggests how you can publicise your work locally.

There will be things happening nationally too. The LGA will be running a session on children in care and adoption at our annual conference (26-28 June 2012).

If you are going to be at the conference, why not come along and join in the debate? You can also expect to see relevant publications and resources being launched during the week.



10 ideas for Corporate Parenting Week

Many councils will already be carrying out these kinds of activities throughout the year as part of their approach to corporate parenting. For some, Corporate Parenting Week will provide an opportunity to review or refresh existing activity. For others, it might be a chance to do or start planning something new. Either way, it is a fantastic opportunity to focus on this important issue and promote what you are doing locally.

1. Get the community involved

There are lots of ways that the goodwill and support of your local community can be harnessed to help support looked after children as part of the activities described below. Councillors are at the heart of their communities and can use their knowledge and contacts to help get people and organisations involved.

Local areas will have different routes, groups and contacts for community engagement. These could be used to encourage local people to mentor young people, develop partnerships with colleges to encourage more looked after children to go on to further education, or to speak to local businesses about work experience or apprenticeship opportunities. The voluntary and community sector in your area can also play a key role in helping to support young people.

Involving people in the community could help children and young people in care develop stronger support networks, lead to greater access to opportunities and break down some of the public prejudice that still exists.

2. Mentoring

There can all too often be stigma attached to being in care. Ofsted found that nearly half of children in care were afraid of prejudice or bullying or of being treated 'differently' if people knew their background. A mentor can provide a role model, someone to relate to and be inspired by, to learn new skills from or simply someone independent to listen. A report into mentoring for care leavers by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that 93 per cent had positive outcomes from their mentoring relationship.

Luton Borough Council's Independent Visitor Scheme provides a befriending service for children in care up to the age of 18. Their Mentoring service is for young care leavers or older children in care up to the age of 25. Their research shows that a long term, safe and trusted independent adult can make a significant difference to the wellbeing of a child in care.

Mentors usually meet the young person for around two hours per week, depending on the arrangements agreed in each case. This time might be spent helping with homework, setting goals, talking about school, jobs or ambitions for the future and encouraging participation in productive activities.

Corporate Parenting Week could provide an opportunity to promote an existing scheme and recruit more volunteers or launch a new programme. One way of encouraging corporate participation might be to allow council employees to use a set amount of work time per week for mentoring activities. Councillors might also want to consider becoming a mentor themselves and provide support at a critical time in a young person's life to help them through what for most people is a difficult time, doubly so without the support that others get from their families.

3. Work experience and shadowing

Young people that have been in care are more likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) than their peers. In the year ending March 2011, 32 per cent of 19 year olds that had been in care aged 16 were NEET, compared with 22 per cent of all 19 year olds.

Work experience placements provide a chance for young people to build confidence and the necessary social or workplace skills needed to secure future employment. These types of opportunities are often arranged by a relative or family friend. However councils can use their status as employers to offer opportunities for looked after children or encourage local partner organisations and businesses to provide them. Councillors can be well-placed to help open up these opportunities within the local community.

Work experience can range from short one-day shadowing visits to longer placements that lead to gaining qualifications, depending on the needs of the young person.

Newcastle City Council has just introduced a system of preferential interviews for young people in care who apply for jobs with the council. The authority also organises a successful work placement programme for looked after children, including placements within communications and marketing.

CBBC programme Tracey Beaker is filmed in Newcastle. It centres around life in a children's home. The council arranged an exclusive set visit for three groups of looked after children, in particular those who might be interested in careers in media. The visit was a huge success with both the looked after children and the programme's cast.



Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council's Looked After Supported Employment (LASE) Scheme provides paid work experience for 'looked after' young people usually aged between 16 and 19. It is an opportunity for them to gain new and positive experiences within a functional work place environment. Most young people on LASE enroll onto an accredited qualification which in many cases can take up to 12 months to complete. The scheme supports the pathway planning work of Bolton's Post 16 social work team. Council departments have responded impressively to their 'corporate parenting' role by offering looked after young people a range of work experience opportunities.

Under the new Quest programme (commencing May 2012) young people who do not feel ready for the challenge of extended accredited training can access a 12 week employability skills programme. Quest has been developed with support and funding from a range of Bolton Housing providers. Young people completing the 12 week course will be eligible to gain a further 4 week paid work experience placement within Bolton Council, Bolton at Home or a range of our partner agencies.

Both the LASE and Quest schemes are managed by a full-time coordinator working within the Corporate Children's Office. These two schemes are just some of the many educational, vocational and corporate parenting projects contributing to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people in Bolton. Information on these schemes and more can be found on the Plodge website (<http://www.plodge.org.uk>).



4. Celebration events

Looked after children can have difficult journeys through life and face a lot of challenges, often without the stability of support networks others have. Publicly celebrating achievements is one way to help encourage and motivate young people and dispel some of the public misconceptions about “troublesome” children in care. Awards can recognise, for example, educational achievements and attendance, improved behaviour or helping others.

Corporate Parenting Week could provide an opportunity to hold an event or launch a nomination process for one in future. Children and young people in care could be invited to be involved in helping to plan and organise the event which could build their confidence and valuable skills.

In 2011 **Coventry City Council** held a special awards ceremony for their looked after children. The prom style ceremony celebrated the achievements of looked after children and young people in their school and home lives. Over 200 nominations were received from foster carers, social workers, teachers and other professionals who work with the children. Children and young people, aged between five and 20 years old, all received Special Awards in recognition of their outstanding work to help and support others. Nominations ranged from “trying very hard at school” and being “an inspiration to other” to making “tremendous progress and showing drive and determination”. More than 250 people attended the ceremony which was hosted by the Lord Mayor and a local BBC presenter.



5. Put a spotlight on education

Children in care tend to not do as well at school as their peers. In 2011 only 13 per cent of children in care achieved 5 A*-C grade GCSEs, including maths and English, compared with 58 per cent of all children. Only seven per cent of young people that were in care aged sixteen were in higher education at the age of 19, compared to 31.6 per cent of all 19 year olds.

Options for focusing on how to improve educational attainment of children and young people in care could include:

- Meeting with the Virtual School Head, or equivalent, about the current local situation and any barriers to improving outcomes. Most councils have a Virtual School Head, an officer who acts as a coordinator and champion for improving educational achievement of looked after children.
- Developing relationships and protocols with local colleges and universities to help more care leavers get into further education. This could include agreeing fast track interviews, a reduced point admission protocol for care



leavers, or visit days for children in care or care leavers to get a taste of university life.

- Investigate schemes for younger looked after children to help improve literacy at an early stage.



In 2008 the **London Borough of Lambeth** launched 'Wriggle and Roar', a weekly interactive, early literacy play based group specifically designed for looked after children under four years and their foster carers, parents and/or adopters. Wriggle and Roar was developed in partnership between Lambeth Community Health and Lambeth Children and Young People's Service. The programme brings together a group of children and their foster carers each week to support the development of early communication and literacy skills.

The Scheme was short-listed as a regional finalist of the national Health and Social Care Awards in 2010; and won a local partnership award in 2011 by the NHS for excellent outcomes.

Hampshire County Council has worked in partnership with the University of Winchester to offer a 3 day residential visit at the university for young people in care aged 14-17. The aim is to give young people from a care background an opportunity to experience university life, such as taking part in activities, engaging with current students and living in Halls of Residence. It is also a way of promoting the higher education opportunities open to them.



6. Recruiting foster carers and adopters

The Fostering Network has estimated 8,750 more foster families are needed in 2012, with a particular need for families willing to foster teenagers, sibling groups and disabled children. There is also five times the number of children waiting to be adopted than there are adoptive families. Why not use Corporate Parenting Week to start or refresh a recruitment campaign?

- you can access a range of resources and guides (<http://www.fostering.net/resources/subjects/recruitment-foster-carers>) on recruiting foster carers on the Fostering Network website
- practice points and key learning from research on the recruitment of foster carers can be found on the Social Care Institute for Excellence website (<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide07/carers/recruiting/index.asp>).



7. Councillor training

Corporate parenting is a responsibility of all councillors and Corporate Parenting Week provides an opportunity to reflect on whether all elected members fully understand their own and the council's responsibilities. Councils could consider running a training session and offering materials and resources.

Many councils will have a lot of existing knowledge and materials for training purposes. Some might wish to consider using the National Children's Bureau's Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice toolkit (<http://www.ncb.org.uk/resources/publications/support-resources/corporate-parenting>) which is aimed at supporting councils to review their corporate parenting arrangements and develop training programmes for councillors and staff.

The LGA's 'Must knows' are a source of information and support for lead members for children's services that may be of wider interest for elected members on issues relevant to corporate parenting. The suite of information has been comprehensively revised for 2012 and focuses on the key issues facing lead members for children's services and the current and planned reforms impacting on children's services. They can be accessed through the LGA's website (http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/cyp-improvement-and-support/-/journal_content/56/10171/3554809/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE).

The LGA would be pleased to hear from you if you have ideas on other resources we could provide for elected members which would be helpful.



8. Ask yourself: How well are we doing?

Corporate parenting is an area of high demand, high risk and increasing interest from media, the Government and the public. For these reasons councils know how important it is to understand how well they are performing and where improvements might be made. This will be a regular and on-going process, but Corporate Parenting Week could provide a chance to take stock and review progress.

There are numerous ways to understand performance, for example through self-assessment, peer reviews and other activity through the Children's Improvement Board. Scrutiny panels and reviews also have a key role to play and are a way that councillors beyond lead members for children's services can get involved.



East Sussex County Council runs both a Children Services' Scrutiny Committee and a specific Corporate Parenting Panel. This panel meets every three months and is attended by elected members (including the lead member for children services where possible). They act as a scrutiny tool for the council's performance in corporate parenting. The panel receive regular updates on Ofsted inspections of the council's children services, annual progress reports of the fostering and adoption services, looked after children statistics and feedback on the monthly inspections of children homes and on other relevant performance monitoring and strategic development initiatives. The Panel produces an annual report to the Council and will escalate any performance concerns with the lead member or cabinet members.

Resources include:

- you can access the National Children's Bureau Checklist for Corporate Parents (<http://www.ncb.org.uk/resources/publications/support-resources/corporate-parenting>) and a self-audit and analysis tool
- you can find statistics on outcomes for children in care on the Department for Education website (<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/childrenincare/a00199753/children-in-care-and-adoption-performance-tables>)

- access information about the Children's Improvement Board (http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/home/-/journal_content/56/10171/3143339/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE) which is leading an important new initiative to help councils improve their performance in children's services
- the Centre for Public Scrutiny website (<http://www.cfps.org.uk/>) has a range of resources, including examples of corporate parenting scrutiny reviews
- the Local Government (LG) Inform prototype is a practical response to the sector's call for greater freedom to take responsibility for its own regulation and improvement. This free online service allows anyone in the sector to access, compare and analyse data, and present their findings. LG Inform currently contains a library of around 800 metrics which cover different service areas to help you benchmark your authority's performance. Examples of metrics that are specific to corporate parenting include:
 - looked after children cases which were reviewed within required timescales
 - percentage of children becoming the subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time
 - number of children in need at 31 March.

Such intelligence will help councils make the right decisions about their local areas and the services they provide to their children in care. More information can be found on the Local website www.local.gov.uk/about-lginform or on the Knowledge hub group <https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/group/jwusoizshu>





9. Ask looked after children and young people: How well are we doing?

Children and young people in care are the people affected by the services the council delivers. They are therefore well-placed to say how services can be improved and should be able to participate in decisions about them. It is a good idea to find out how the children and young people would like to be involved.

The Internet and social media are becoming increasingly popular as ways of communicating. Many councillors have their own Twitter account or use websites and blogs to communicate with local residents. These can be ways of engaging with looked after children, publicising their achievements

or providing them with a special route or forum for talking to each other. You may find it useful to read a guide for councillors on using social media (<http://socialmedia.21st.cc/>).

Some other options that councillors might want to consider include:

- setting up a scrutiny panel made up of looked after children
- organising a session with your Children in Care Council
- running a special surgery for young people in care
- visiting children's homes in the area
- carrying out a survey of young people in care.

South Gloucestershire Council has launched a website for children and young people in care and care leavers called 'Us In Care'. It was developed from what children and young people have said they wanted in it and how they wanted it to look. On it is lots of information about being in care and leaving care and there are lots of ways for children to interact with the website.

<https://www.usincare.org.uk/>

Central Bedfordshire Council's Teenage Adoption Panel is made up of adopted young people aged 15 and above who meet three or four times a year depending on the number of adopters. The panel functions along the lines of the "real" Adoption Panel. Newly approved adopters are invited to attend and through the asking and answering of questions on both sides. The idea is that prospective adopters will gain a better insight into the needs, thoughts and feelings of children being adopted, directly from young people who have been through that very experience. If prospective adopters are still being assessed the Panel will give feedback to their social worker which is included in their Prospective Adopters Report. The Teenage Adoption Panel meets with the 'real' adoption panel to feedback their experiences.

10. Sign up to the Foster Carers Charter

The Foster Carers Charter (<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/childrenincare/fostercare/a0071236/charter>) was launched by the Government in March 2011 and has been jointly produced by Government, fostering organisations, charities and children.

The Charter sets out clear principles on how foster carers should be treated, recognises their invaluable work and aims to encourage more people to sign up to be foster carers. The Charter is backed up by new slimmed-down fostering regulations and guidance which came into force April 2011. These make clear to fostering services what their statutory duties are, and reduce the burdens placed on them.

Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council is running a launch event to coincide with them signing up to the Government's Foster Carers Charter. Attending the event will be foster carers, looked after children, social workers, the Mayor and other elected members. The aim of the event is to make everyone aware that Trafford Council are committed to this new charter and what this means.

You can read a note (http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/f/fostering_network_putting_the_charter_into_practice.pdf) produced by the Fostering Network that includes advice on how to put the Foster Carers' Charter into practice and some ideas for discussion when developing local charters.



Publicising the issues and activities locally

Your local media can be key to helping your council publicise the achievements of looked after children and wash away some of the stigma attached to being in care. It is also a great way to showcase the good work your council is doing to help children in care and to grab the attention of families thinking about fostering or adopting.

Whatever your council is planning for Corporate Parenting Week, you may wish to consider involving local journalists. Whether it's running an open surgery, commissioning a survey, finding new ways of searching for fosterers and adopters or publishing plans to make your care services even better, it could be an ideal opportunity to get the positive comments on the services your council runs out to the wider community.

Of course, inviting media to an event never guarantees positive media coverage but putting journalists in touch with council officers and lead members who are out on the ground, helping to change the lives of children in care, can help eliminate any negative assumptions. Giving journalists the chance to speak with and listen to children within the care system whose lives have been changed for the better can also provide a new outlook.

Relevant organisations and resources

Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services
www.c4eo.org.uk/default.aspx

The Children's Commissioner for England
www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

The Department for Education
www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/childrenincare

The Fostering Network
www.fostering.net

National Children's Bureau
www.ncb.org.uk

The NSPCC
www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals/looked_after_children_home_wda79690.html

Office for the Children's Rights Director for England
www.rights4me.org

The Who Cares? Trust
www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk

The Care Leavers Foundation
<http://thecareleaversfoundation.org/index.php>



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