

Our family

Our strategy for children in, and leaving, our care

2018-21

DRAFT as at May 2018

WORK IN PROGRESS DRAFT

Contents

	Page
1. Our vision	2
2. Our approach	2
• Pledge	
• Strategy	
• Sufficiency	
3. 'A helping hand' - Our corporate parenting commitment	3
4. Our children and young people in care and care leavers	5
5. Our priorities	6
6. Outcome priorities. Children and young people looked after will...	6
1. Be involved in their care and treated as individuals	6
2. Have productive relationships: family, friends and community	7
3. Have suitable accommodation and support to meet assessed needs	8
4. Be safe	9
5. Be healthy	10
6. Get the best education and skills	11
7. Be supported in the transition to adulthood and as care leavers	12
7. Delivery priorities	13
1. Reduce the number of children in care	
2. Reduce the costs of care	
3. Enable children and young people to achieve permanence	
4. Assess the impact of all decisions on looked after children	
8. How we will deliver	14
9. How we will report and communicate on progress	14

1. Our vision

We believe that children and young people for whom we are corporate parents are talented, resourceful, are articulate and have huge potential. Many will lead successful adult lives. However, we also recognise that often as a result of their early life experiences some will be at greater risk of poor outcomes as they grow up.

Our aim is to create a home and community environment that provides every child and young person with a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to meet their full potential.

2. Our approach

This is a strategy for all partners in Stockton-on-Tees. The Council leads it, because the Council has specific statutory responsibilities, but we have always worked in Stockton-on-Tees on the principle of collective responsibility and priority, and the idea of the “extended family”.

The strategy includes:

1. A refreshed **pledge** to children and young people in care and care leavers, based on the priorities developed by the Let’s Take Action Group, our Children in care Council for 11+.
2. A **strategy** document, this document. The audience for this is mainly the range of partners who together make up the extended family for corporate parenting.
3. A **sufficiency statement and strategy** – which sets out how we are meeting our duty to ensure there are homes for every child and young person in our care, and includes a range of facts and figures as the profile of young people in care and care leavers.

3. 'A helping hand' - our corporate parenting commitment

What do we mean by corporate parenting?

Everything in this strategy is about corporate parenting: it describes the way we will work to improve outcomes and life chances for children in our care, and how we will champion them, and support them to be the best they can be in life.

We have always taken the view that corporate parenting is best achieved across the extended family – working with our partners. However, there are specific duties on the Council which we must fulfil.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires the Council to have regard to a set of corporate parenting principles when exercising its functions in relation to looked after children and care leavers (former relevant children).

1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of children and young people.
2. To encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
3. To take into account of the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people.
4. To help children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for children and young people.
6. For 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.

This strategy sets out how the Council, and its partners intendeds to fulfil these requirements.

We want to go further though. This is not just about fulfilling requirements, but about ambition and aspiration for the children in our care and leaving our care.

We are determined to ensure that that their needs are given the highest priority and that they are valued and cared about not only by those who look after them on a daily basis but also by those who make decisions, politically, corporately and operationally. This means...

- That we will work to deliver the priorities in this strategy, and that we will be open and honest about progress.
- That we want to do more than deliver what we have to, and recognise the many individual and organisational ways in which we can achieve much more than our service or thematic roles as defined in our priorities.
- Elected members of the Council will be clear about their roles, and the actions they can take to be good corporate parents.
- That senior officers in the Council will go above and beyond their roles to achieve the best for children and young people in care, using their personal authority and resources to do more.
- That all of our partners in Stockton will take their corporate parenting role seriously, and will commit to do the best they can, as part of an extended family.
- That all officers of the Council are clear about what they can do to contribute.

Where we think we can make an even bigger difference

So, as well as delivering against the priorities in this strategy, we are also looking at a number of ideas for going further. Where we can use the skills and talents and resources of those who work for us and with us, and which is far away from statutory responsibility:

1. Rebranding 'corporate parenting' so it is clearer what we mean. The idea of 'our kids....a helping hand' is part of this.
2. We want to establish a scheme in the Council where all Members and officers can contribute either through giving time or money, to have a real stake in the future of children and young people in our care and care leavers.
3. We want to work with the Virtual School around a governing body and parent teacher association.
4. Creating more job opportunities for children in care and care leavers.
5. Mentoring for care leavers.

4. Our children and young people in our care and care leavers

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5. Our priorities

We have identified two sets of priorities:

1. Outcome priorities – these are our key priorities for children in our care, what we want to achieve.
2. Delivery priorities are more about how we will deliver them and why.

6. Outcome priorities. Children and young people looked after will.....

1. Be involved in their care and treated as individuals

Our commitment

We want children and young people in care to be involved in all aspects of their life, and have the opportunity to contribute in a variety of ways to ensure that the care and support they receive is tailored to their needs and wishes.

Actions

1. We will support the role of the Children in Care Council (CiCC): Let's Take Action Group and Positive Activities Group (including whether further age range approaches are necessary). This will include implementing the outcomes of the current Inspiring Voices project to increase the awareness of the CiCC.
2. We will ensure that all Children in Our Care know their IRO, and their role, and that there are face to face meetings between reviews wherever possible.
3. We will provide opportunities for children and young people to feed in their views about their care, including through technology such as Mind of My Own (MOMO).
4. We will ensure that there are a range of additional ways to be involved and to give views, including through school based opportunities.
5. We will ensure that reviews, meetings and plans are clear about the voice of the child, make sense and are understood as documents by children and young people.
6. We will ensure that all children and young people have the opportunity for an advocate if they want one.

2. Have productive relationships: family, friends and community life

Our commitment

We want all children and young people to feel part of a family, to have friends and to be part of a community. Building up stable and trusting relationships, and feeling part of a community is an essential ingredient for emotional wellbeing.

Actions

- 1.** We will continue to support the training and development of foster carers to ensure they have the right skills and confidence to create a stable family home for children and young people in care.
- 2.** We will continue to support the training and development of residential care staff to enable them to provide the best care possible in a safe and nurturing environment.
- 3.** We recognise the particular issues children and young people in care face around the development of safe and trusting relationships, and the specific support which might be needed to support personal resilience.
- 4.** We will ensure there are opportunities to become involved in community activity, including leisure, sport and cultural activity, including opportunities for volunteering.

3. Have suitable accommodation and support to meet assessed needs

Our commitment

We will ensure that every child and young person in care in Stockton experiences high quality care based on an appropriate and detailed assessment of needs.

When a child becomes looked after, this will be a positive choice and the decision will have been made wherever possible with the agreement of the child or young person, their family and significant others.

When a child becomes looked after, or leaves our care, there will be a sufficient range and choice of provision and support.

Actions

1. We will ensure there is a comprehensive and up to date assessment of needs in place.
2. We will ensure that there is sufficient capacity to meet the needs of children in care.
3. We will ensure a range of accommodation options are available including support to families where this may avoid the need for children to come into care.
4. We will ensure that there is a range of education options in place to meet needs, when children and young people have to move.

4. Be Safe

Our commitment

We want all children and young people in our care to be and feel safe. Whilst taking some risks is part of growing up, we know that children and young people in care can sometimes be exposed to more risks and become more vulnerable. This can lead on to anti-social behaviour and offending or to increased risk of harm. We will work to reduce offending by children and young people in care.

Actions

1. We will ensure advice and guidance / support especially on e-safety and risky behaviour is in place.
2. We will continue to review individual plans to ensure there is a focus on actions to keep children and young people safe.
3. We will prioritise the needs of children and young people in care in the work of the preventions and YOT teams.
4. We will monitor all children missing from care episodes, ensure that there are suitable plans in place and that we listen to the reasons for going missing and take action to reduce risks.
5. We will reduce anti-social behaviour, through a focus on relationships and restorative approaches, and sanctions if appropriate.

5. Be healthy

Our commitment

We want all children and young people in care to be healthy, physically and emotionally, and will ensure that they receive assessments, provision and priority.

Actions

1. We will ensure all health assessments / dental assessments are undertaken in timescales, and that action is taken to address health concerns and issues identified.
2. We will prioritise children and young people in care in our work on managing potentially harmful behaviour: smoking, alcohol, substance misuse.
3. We will ensure that all children and young people in care have access to information, advice and support on sexual health.
4. We will prioritise the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people in care – using Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires and other tools to measure progress.
5. We will review the emotional wellbeing and mental health services provided to children in care. We will challenge the role of schools in using Pupil Premium to access support.
6. We will work with GPs to support their skills and awareness of the needs of children and young people in care.
7. We will work to give priority access to children on our care to all commissioned services – initially focusing on therapeutic services such as Speech and language Therapy, Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy.

6. Get the best education and skills

Commitment

All children and young people in care will be encouraged and supported to achieve success, have high personal ambition and be able to realise that ambition. We will be aspirational in helping children and young people to believe in themselves, to aim high and to have their skills to succeed

Actions

1. We will continue to prioritise the needs of children and young people in care in our coordinated school admissions process and seek, where possible to have continuity of educational placements.
2. We will continue to deliver a high quality Virtual School and ensure there is a well-trained Designated Teacher to support in every school.
3. We will continue to focus on improving the quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPs).
4. We will focus on improving the attendance of children and young people in care.
5. We will ensure that every child and young person in care is following an aspirational, academic and appropriate curriculum, which will lead to strong outcomes. Any alternative provision will be registered and of sufficient quality.
6. We will support young people to access further and higher education and to develop their skills.
7. We will ensure there is high quality support to young people around careers and choices in post 16 options.
8. We will ensure that children in our care with special educational needs can access the right school and the right support.

7. Be supported in the transition to adulthood and as care leavers

Our commitment

We are committed to support young people who have experienced care to move towards independence at a time that reflects their individual needs, emotional maturity and coping skills

Actions

1. We will refresh our Care Leavers Charter.
2. We will ensure that appropriate guidance and advice is in place through dedicated Personal Adviser support.
3. All children and young people will have an up to date and comprehensive Pathway Plan.
4. We will ensure there are a range of accommodation options, including Staying Put and supported lodgings, and the opportunity to refurbish empty properties.
5. We will support care leavers into employment, education and training.
6. We will commit to the longer term tracking of care leavers.
7. We will continue to identify and support care leavers who are parents.
8. We have agreed that care leavers do not have to pay Council tax until they are 25.

7. Delivery priorities

We have identified four key priorities around delivery:

1. Reduce the number of children and young people in care.
2. Ensure the best value for money for children and young people in care.
3. Ensure the right permanence option is in place for children and young people as soon as possible, including a focus on returning home.
4. Assessing the impact on children in our care from all decisions made by the Council and its partners.

We want to avoid children having to come into care wherever possible. This is better for many children young people and families as their own family is best placed to provide the care and support needed. Many children and young people come into our care at times of family crisis and stay in care for short periods before going home. We want to look at whether we could do more to prevent children and young people from having to come into care, by looking at the ways in which we can support families at times of crisis.

When children and young people do come into care, we want to do as much as we can to ensure we receive value for money in the delivery of care, by thinking about how we can work more efficiently, and how we can ensure a reduced need for out of borough residential placements.

We want to make sure that children and young people are clear about the right long term option for them. We want to enable children and young people to be able to return home as soon as it is safe and practical for them to do so, as for the majority of children and young people this will be the best option. This means we will look at how we can provide work with families and children and young people to ensure that reconciliation is pursued as a permanence option.

The Council is undertaking a review of its approach to children and young people in care in 2016 which will explore these issues and support the development of an updated sufficiency strategy.

We will ensure that all key decisions taken by partners will include an assessment of the impact on children in care and care leavers. This is already standard practice for the Council, and will be rolled out to all partners, based on the priorities identified in this partnership strategy.

8. How we will deliver

The delivery of this strategy will be overseen by the new Corporate Parenting Board (CPB).

The operational lead for delivery will be via the Children in Our Care Strategic Group.

We will continue to engage with children and young people in care throughout, including:

- Let's Take Action, Positive Activities, Young Inspectors Group and Inspiring Voices.
- Specific events and activities for all Looked After Children coordinated through our Children's Rights and Participation Officer.
- Feedback from other engagement such as through schools and learning from the outcomes of statutory reviews.

9. How we will report and communicate on progress

Progress will be reported into the Children and Young People's Partnership every 6 months.

We will feed back to children and young people in care on progress, using methods which we will agree with them.

We will ensure every carer gets feedback on progress.