



# **CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY**

**2017 – 2020**

**(March 2017)**





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## **1. Foreword**

Welcome to Hounslow's Corporate Parenting Strategy which sets out our responsibilities for the children and young people in care. Whenever a child or young person is cared for by Hounslow the Council becomes their Corporate Parent. Councillors, staff and partner agencies are collectively responsible for making sure that children and young people looked after receive the best care possible, achieve their full potential and are supported to establish the foundations for a happy, healthy and productive life.

Children in care are sometimes faced with circumstances that may disadvantage them compared with their peers. This is why we take our corporate parenting responsibilities very seriously, continually strive to do better and set high aspirations. Hounslow has a legal and moral duty to provide a standard of care that any good parent would want for their own child.

We have much to be proud of in Hounslow, including the many achievements of children in our care and those leaving care. However, there is no room for complacency and we have identified a number of areas requiring improvement in order to provide excellent care and to be a truly effective corporate parent in the future.

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Strategy is to ensure that we are all working towards common goals and ambitions for children in care and care leavers. No one individual, team, service, or agency can do this alone which is why collaborative working, at both a strategic and operational level, is essential. This strategy complements and supports other planning mechanisms across Hounslow but it specifically focuses on children in care and care leavers. It holds everyone responsible including professionals, services, partners and elected members. We should all be able to demonstrate how we are working together to achieve its key aims.

**Cllr Tom Bruce**, Cabinet Member – Education and Children's Services

**Jacqui McShannon**, Director of Children's Safeguarding and Specialist Services

## 2. Introduction

This strategy sets out the intentions of Hounslow Council in relation to improving outcomes for children and young people who are looked after by the Local Authority. The Council will support children to stay with their families wherever possible, providing relevant, timely and targeted support services to prevent them going into care. Unfortunately for some children, they are unable to stay with their families and will require care and support from the local authority. These children and young people are among the most vulnerable in our community. They are entitled to the best services that can be provided, and achieving this for them requires understanding, commitment and passion from all agencies and individuals, who hold a responsibility to providing services to them.

Children and young people looked after are not a homogenous group and come with different experiences and needs. They may be looked after for a few days or for many years. Regardless of these different circumstances we have the same aspirations for the children we are responsible for as any parent would. We want children and young people to develop into resilient, successful individuals, able to form healthy relationships and take advantage of every positive opportunity presented.

The council has a duty, embedded within our policies and procedures, to support families to care for their own children, using all universal and targeted support available. However, when children cannot live safely within their own extended families, the council acquires a corporate parenting duty towards those children. The council also has a duty to ensure sufficient accommodation is available for children looked after and that services are provided to children at risk of entering care or custody – the 'sufficiency duty'.

The term "**Corporate Parenting**" refers to the Council's collective responsibility to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are "looked after" or "in care". The Corporate Parenting Service has the responsibility to fulfil the legal duties under The Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004, Leaving Care Act 2000 and the Children and Young Persons Act 2008. The term Corporate Parenting is used widely to describe the duties and responsibilities associated within these Acts.

This strategy will be supplemented with an action plan which will be developed to ensure that the commitments set out in this document are effectively implemented and monitored.

## 3. Who are Looked After Children and Young People?

Looked After Children are those that are cared for by the local authority. These children and young people may need alternative care and accommodation for a variety of different reasons but in most cases there are concerns about the parenting they have received, and in some cases this includes situations where children and young people have been abused or neglected. In the case of asylum seeking children and children and young people whose parents have died, there may not be a parent or relative available to care for them. Once children and young people become looked after they may be placed with family or friends, foster carers, in residential children's homes, adopted or receive short breaks.

Corporate parenting responsibility also extends to care leavers who start to prepare to leave the care of the local authority from the age of 16 years. Children who remain in care until the age of 17 will be discharged on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. These young people will then become care leavers, normally until the age of 21 years, or 25 years if they are in higher education or have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

#### **4. Who are Corporate Parents?**

All Councillors take on the role of corporate parent to children and young people looked after by the local authority when they become an elected member. This is a role that all Councillors acquire, not just those who are interested in children's issues or who are involved with the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Councillors have a legal duty to ensure the well-being and development of looked after children and young people and actively promote their life chances and outcomes. In their role as a corporate parent, Councillors are a powerful advocate for looked after children and young people, ensuring that their interests come first and that they receive opportunities to make a success of their life.

The Director and Lead Member hold specific responsibility for children and young people. The Director 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 have a complimentary working relationship and report to the Chief Executive and Council Leader who should ensure that outcomes for all children and young people are reflected across the whole Council and the Health and Well-being Board.

The particular responsibilities of the Director and Lead Member are set out in Statutory Guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services (published April 2013 by Department for Education).

Looked after children and young people are not solely the responsibility of Children's Services. When a child or young person becomes looked after the corporate parenting role becomes the responsibility of everyone working in, or with the Council, including elected members, staff and partners. Councillors set the strategic direction and priorities for Council's services and require all Council departments to work well together and in partnership with other key agencies, to promote the best possible life chances and outcomes for looked after children, young people and care leavers.

More specifically, the Director and Lead member in their respective roles have a shared responsibility with all officers and members of the local authority to act as effective and caring corporate parents for looked after children, with key roles in improving their educational attainment, providing stable and high quality placements and proper planning for when they leave care. Responsibilities will include:

- Supporting good parenting from every person involved in the child's life
- Considering the views of children and young people so that they have a real say in the decisions that affect their future
- Providing children and young people with stability in their lives, and
- Raising the aspirations of looked after children by expecting the same for them as a parent would expect for their own children
- Ensuring that other local agencies such as schools, health and youth offending teams share this responsibility. The Director is responsible for engaging relevant agencies so they understand their corporate parenting responsibility and provide the right support in a timely way.

#### **5. Elected Members and Council and Partner Agencies**

Whilst the Director and Lead Member have specific roles and responsibilities, all other elected members and senior officers across a range of providers have corporate parenting responsibilities, which include;

- Ensuring that the commitments outlined in this strategy are delivered
- Ensure that governance arrangements are in place to implement any decisions across the authority and partner agencies
- Rigorously analyse the needs of the Council's children in care population to inform service and financial planning, and
- Provide leadership to achieve excellent outcomes.

Elected members and senior managers across the Council and partner agencies have been committed to fulfilling the corporate parenting role in a number of ways. Examples include:

- Elected members sitting on Adoption and Fostering Panels and the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel
- Regular meetings between representatives of the Children in Care Council, with the Lead Member, Director and Head of Service
- Membership of the Hounslow Safeguarding Children's Board.

## 6. Legal Duties and Responsibilities

The Corporate Parenting Service has responsibility to fulfil the legal duties under The Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004, Leaving Care Act 2000 and the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

The Children Act 1989 sets out the local authority's legal duties and responsibilities which underpin service provision for looked after children, young people 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 latest guidance associated with the Act.

Subsequent legislation has extended and strengthened the Children Act 1989, for example:

- **Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000** - extends the types of service and upper age limit of young people the local authority are responsible for as a corporate parent.
- **Children Act 2004** - contains a statutory requirement for local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children and young people and emphasizes the role of collaborative service agreements to achieve the right type of service provision.
- **Children & Young Persons Act 2008** - reinforced the message that all councils, and particularly elected members, hold responsibility for ensuring good outcomes for looked after children and young people.

In addition to the responsibilities placed on the local authority, the Children Act 1989 section 27, places a duty on other providers such as health, housing and education services to assist social care services by providing appropriate support as part of their corporate parenting responsibilities.

The report '*Care Matters: Time for Change*' (2007) demonstrated a specific focus on children in care. This document sets out a desirable direction for improvements that should be made for children in care. 'Care Matters' sets out a range of intentions to improve both outcomes for children and young people in care and the levels of skill and competence of those staff who act as Corporate Parents, and of staff and carers directly supporting children.

In April 2013 The Care Inquiry published '*Making not Breaking; Building Relationships*' for our most vulnerable children'. This report 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 people who care for and about children is vital.

The new Children and Social Work Bill will provide standards for how local authorities should act as a corporate parent for children in care as they transition into adulthood. As well as a focus on care leavers, it will also continue to promote adoption and ensure council's and courts prioritise a child's need for stability when making decisions about their future.

## **7. Local Context**

Our most recent data from 2016/17 on the numbers of looked after children show that Hounslow has had between 270 and 300. The underlying trend in numbers in the previous three years has been a reducing one. The majority of children are placed in Hounslow or in neighbouring boroughs. In 2016/17, around 18% of children were placed more than 20 miles away from their family home, compared to 22% in 2014/15. The large majority of looked after children are placed with foster carers, with a small number of children placed in residential units, which are appropriate for children with disabilities, complex needs or mental health issues. At any point in time, there are fewer than 10 children who are placed beyond 100 miles away, some of whom are matched with long-term foster carers, in stable placements.

All placements are sourced through the Placements Team and processes are in place to negotiate the most appropriate placement to meet the child's needs. Only providers with an Ofsted rating of "good" or "outstanding" are considered and placements are only made away from the borough if local options are not available or it is necessary to meet the child's specific needs or ensure their safety.

We have also increased our range of suitable placements for care leavers through "Staying Put" arrangements where young people can remain with their existing carers up to the age of 21.

There are two in house residential provisions within Hounslow – The Ride and Westbrook both have been rated as Good by Ofsted. The Ride was last inspected in October 2016 and the inspectors were very impressed by the young people's experience of the care they received from the unit. The inspection outcome was Good in all areas and Outstanding for leadership and management.

## **8. Collective Responsibility**

Effective corporate parenting needs the commitment of elected members and professionals and requires an approach that embraces the whole of the Council and key partner agencies. All local services are expected to work well together to develop a joined up approach and deliver integrated services to improve life chances and the best possible outcomes for looked after children and young people.

The underlying principles of Hounslow's commitment of children and young people in care and care leavers are:

- Looked after children and young people are entitled to the same level of care, support, stability, health care and educational opportunity that good parents generally provide
- Good corporate parenting entails responsibility, duty, accountability and high expectations of service delivery which are embedded across the Council and its partners
- Securing a good quality of life, high aspirations and the opportunity to experience a happy childhood are our key considerations for looked after children



- The needs of looked after children and young people must be considered by the Council and its partners when developing new policies and services
- The voice of children and young people in care and care-leavers must be listened to in the many decisions made about their lives and they must be encouraged to participate in the development of policy and practice
- Corporate parenting responsibilities extend to those who are care leavers
- Children and young people in care should access universal services wherever appropriate to encourage their sense of community and belonging while recognising that for some their needs and circumstances may require specialist or targeted services to be in place.

## **9. The Corporate Parenting Role**

The corporate parenting role can be demonstrated in a number of different ways, including, but not restricted to, the following;

- Engage with looked after children and young people to ascertain their views, wishes and feelings and support them to have a voice and participate in planning and decision making processes
- Be aspirational and champion the needs of looked after children and young people
- Influence others to work collaboratively and share responsibility for promoting and meeting the needs of looked after children and young people
- Ensure provision of high quality care and placements that offer safe, stable and nurturing environments where looked after children and young people can thrive
- Ensure access to good quality schools (including schools rated either Outstanding or Good by Ofsted), colleges and other education institutions that provide teaching and learning opportunities to help looked after children and young people achieve their full potential
- Ensure access to good quality health services that identify needs promptly and offer targeted and specialist treatment to looked after children and young people when necessary
- Ensure good quality housing and accommodation for care leavers
- Acknowledge and celebrate looked after children and young people's achievements, through a celebratory ceremony
- Understand the impact of all Council decisions on looked after children and young people
- Be knowledgeable about the needs and circumstances of looked after children and young people and be aware how these may change over time
- Ensure that the quality of service delivery and overall performance is good and that action is taken to address any shortcomings that may occur.

## **10. Improvements made to Corporate Parenting Panel Service**

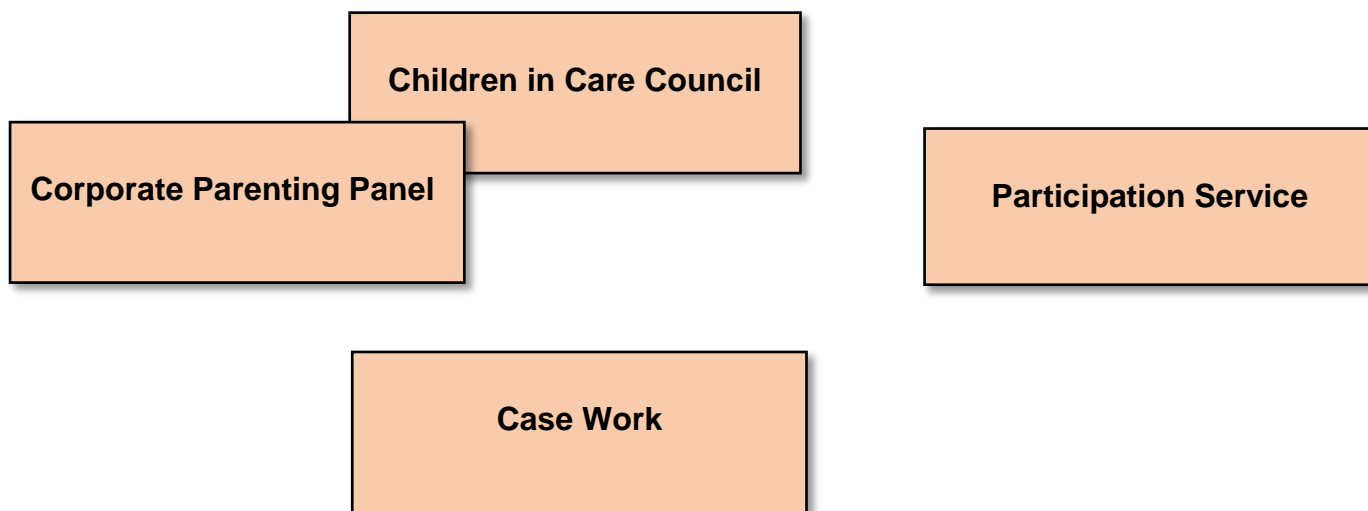
Following the last Ofsted inspection, the Corporate Parenting Service has made significant improvements and has worked effectively to achieve the following:

- Ensuring that Hounslow is looking after the right children at the right time with the right outcomes
- Care proceedings initiated on children who were Section 20 and where the local authority is required to have 'parental responsibility' to make major decisions around their welfare
- Out of borough children were returned to local placements, as long as it was in their best interests to do so

- Placements at Bed & Breakfast and other accommodation provisions were reviewed to ensure that children and young people were moved from unsuitable accommodation to suitable accommodation
- Strong management and leadership put in place to ensure cases had good quality management oversight and decision-making
- A revised model and workflow for missing children and children subject to sexual exploitation (CSE)
- Established the Virtual College to improve the educational outcomes for looked after children and care leavers
- A robust framework put in place to focus on costs, efficiency and value for money.

## 11. How do we engage with our Looked After Children?

Hounslow has an excellent record of strong engagement with its looked after children. The local authority engages with young people in a systematic and formal way on a regular basis, through a range of well-established and represented forums and processes. The three main mechanisms are illustrated below, with further details about each of these detailed in the strategy.



## 12. Corporate Parenting Panel

Hounslow's Corporate Parenting Panel was originally established in 2001 and includes representation from Councillors, council officers, partners and representatives from the Children in Care Council who meet together on a quarterly basis. The Panel is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services and meet four times during the year.

There is an agenda which is part of a forward plan that is agreed following consultation with looked after children, care leavers and elected members and there are minutes of the Panel meetings to record discussion and decisions. The Corporate Parenting Panel is responsible for driving significant improvements to ensure that looked after children, young people and care leavers receive high quality care and services that meet their needs, support their progress and deliver positive outcomes. The Corporate Parenting Panel ensures that key issues and developments are well communicated and highlighted as part of the local governance arrangements for Children's Services.

Young people are well represented on the panel and are invited to present items at each meeting. The young people that attend have given positive feedback about their

involvement. They see it not only as a way for their voice to be heard at the highest level but a good opportunity to see how the council works and how officers are held to account. Throughout the year the young people have reported enjoying delivering interactive elements during their young people's slot and they have led focus group activities to find out members' views.

The Corporate Parenting Panel has Terms of Reference (see appendix A) and each new member of the Panel signs a membership agreement outlining their roles and duties which is co-signed by the Lead Member and Chair of the Children in Care Council.

The panel will regularly review local and national policy and context and ensure discussions are relevant to current needs.

### **13. Children in Care Council**

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is the main forum in which young people are able to influence policy and practice. For example, in 2016 children in care and care leavers took part in the annual survey, giving feedback on their care experience and making suggestions on how to improve things such as reducing stress and anxiety during transitions from changing placements and leaving care. In response to this, an action in the annual survey monitoring plan is for social workers to develop a checklist to carry out with young people when they enter a new home, which should include considering things from a young person's perspective.

Other activities include young people taking part in interviews for social workers and some of them were part of the interview process in recruiting our new Head of Service for Corporate Parenting and the Participation Officer. They have participated in several consultations and provided input to research for organisations such as the *Who Cares? Trust now Become*, and were consulted on the new service specification for the Life Project to provide supported accommodation in Hounslow. Total Respect training is delivered by experienced young people, giving professionals the chance to hear first-hand the effect of social care practice and engages them in activities designed to enhance their practice and ability to keep young people's experiences at the centre of their work.

Over the next year, it is planned to build on our successes, increase participation in our CiCC and develop a Care Leavers' forum. There will be monitoring of the implementation of actions from the 2016 annual survey and developing and consulting with young people again for our 2017 annual survey. We will also diversify the way we engage with our young people including using social media, a revamped magazine and a new website page aimed to reach a wider audience.

There are a range of engagement activities planned for the coming aimed to build confidence, self-esteem and resilience, as well as independent living skills for young people.

As the service continues to be shaped by the voice and needs of young people there will be more additions to report back on this time next year.

The CiCC has regular opportunities to engage and consult with Councillors and senior officers and is able to give a voice to local looked after children, young people and care leavers.

The CiCC is also represented on the Corporate Parenting Panel and provides a mechanism for open and transparent engagement with looked after children, young people and care leavers at every level of planning, commissioning, service design and evaluation. The CiCC has Terms of Reference that are reviewed on a regular basis.

The CiCC participate in a range of activities and reviews how celebrations and achievements are recognised and promoted, contribute to staff and member training, take part in staff recruitment and have opportunities to shape service delivery.

#### 14. Participation Service

The Participation Service, situated within the heart of the Corporate Parenting Service, aims to ensure that children and young people in care and care leavers have a voice and can effectively influence policy and practice within Corporate Parenting and Children's Services.

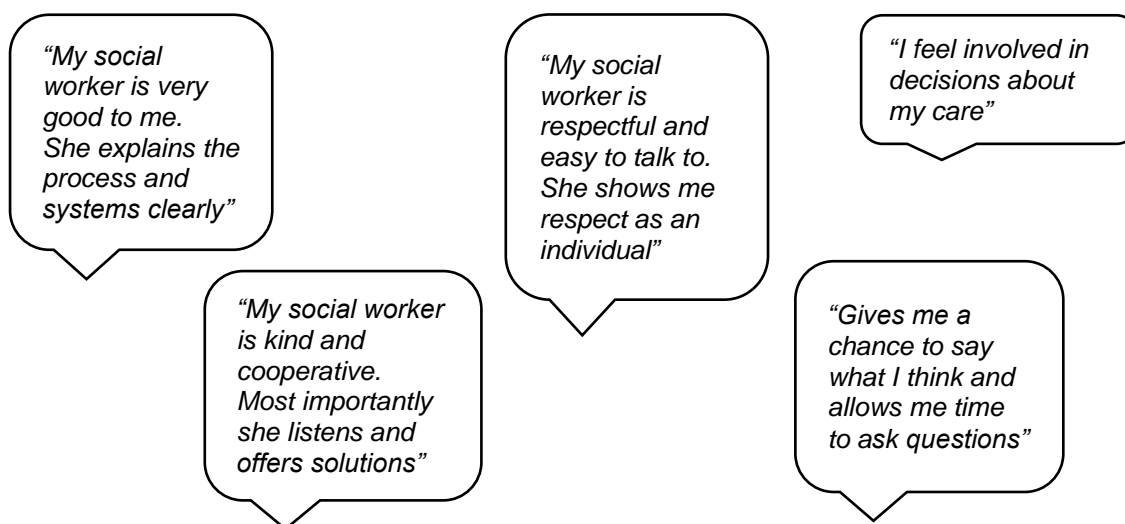
The Participation Service also aims to provide engagement and enrichment activities, giving young people the opportunity to socialise with other experienced young people, develop skills and qualities such as resilience and self-esteem and engage in training opportunities.

Some examples of this engagement include young people's involvement in the interview process for social workers and Head of Corporate Parenting. They have also participated in several consultations, including input to research for organisations such as the *Who Cares? Trust now Become*, and were consulted on the new service specification for the Life Project to provide supported accommodation in Hounslow.

#### 15. Case work

Engaging with children and young people is an integral part of the day to day role of all our social care staff and those that care for children, including social workers, IROs and foster carers. Children and young people are consulted with as a matter of course and this is embedded within team working practices.

Consultation carried out with young people by the Late Entry Team and Through Care Team showed that young people felt they were very much involved in decisions about their care. There has been some extremely positive feedback from young people about their social workers with regards to the support that has been provided to them. These are a few examples of the feedback received from young people:



#### 16. Supporting our most Vulnerable Looked After Children and Young People

##### 16.1 Missing Children and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Significant progress has been made in relation to children missing from care and those who are at higher risk of sexual exploitation. A comprehensive workflow is in place to track missing children and ensure action is taken promptly to assess immediate risks, locate the

child and inform key parties. This often happens immediately after the alert is received via the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) which is sent daily. The activities include holding an urgent strategy discussion with the Police, completing 'grab packs' (essential information on the child), briefing senior managers and key professionals. Return interviews are conducted as soon as the child is located or found. In the more complex cases multi-agency strategy meetings would be held within 48 hours and referrals made to the MASE panel in cases where there is a concern around sexual exploitation.

## **16.2 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)**

The Corporate Parenting Service continues to support unaccompanied minors who arrive via the Croydon rota or Calais UASC routes. In 2017, Hounslow welcomed children and young people from Calais and assisted some young people to be reunited with their families via the 'Dublin 3' agreement.

Over the last two years the Corporate Parenting Service has developed a degree of expertise and skills in this area. The social workers (Late Entry Team) have been trained to undertake 'Age Assessments' and 'Human Rights Assessments' (HRA), which take into account the impact of separation, loss and trauma on the UASCs.

## **17. Pledge**

The Government's "Care Matters" (2006) initiative required local authorities to develop a local Pledge for looked after children, young people and care leavers. The Pledge sets out the looked after children, young people and care leaver's entitlements as well as specific opportunities and support that is available to them. The Children in Care Council has a role in developing the Pledge and reviewing it over time.

The Hounslow Pledge, first created in 2008, contains 47 key commitments for children, young people and care leavers. The Pledge is ambitious and forms the basis of an agreement between Hounslow and individual children. The current Pledge will be reviewed and updated for this year.

## **18. Corporate Parenting Commitments**

This strategy details our commitment to support our children in care and care leavers to reach their potential through the provision of excellent parenting, high quality health and education, opportunities to develop their talents and skills, and effective support for their transition to adulthood. It emphasises the need for effective partnership working and the importance of respecting the voice of young people themselves.

We are committed to making a positive difference to ensure that all the children in our care and those who are leaving our care are provided with the same degree of care and support that any good parent would provide. To this end, we must ensure that all aspects of a child's journey in care has effective and robust processes in place. Our commitments are therefore structured with the following key stages:

- 1. When a child becomes looked after - providing high quality and timely planning**
- 2. When a child is in our care - providing high quality care**
- 3. When a child leaves care - providing high quality and timely permanency planning**

Our commitments, strategies and processes within each of these stages of care are set out below.

### *When a child becomes looked after - providing high quality and timely planning*

#### **Care Planning**

The following commitments will be delivered to ensure effective care planning:

- Ensure that children and young people in care are looked after in a way which promotes their wellbeing, improves their quality of life and maximises their life chances
- Aim to secure the child and young people's long term future without delay through early reunification with their birth family or, where this is not possible, through a permanent placement with an alternative family
- Place children and young people with a relative, friend or other connected person by the most legally secure route possible when this is in their best interest

### *When a child is in our care - providing high quality care*

#### **Educational Achievement**

Working closely with our Virtual College, we are ensuring that education attainment for all our children in care receives our highest priority and we aim to narrow the gap between the achievements of children who are not in care and those who are looked after. We are also committed to ensuring that all children looked after by the Council are able to fulfil their educational potential.

All looked after children are required to have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) to ensure that their educational targets are set with a support plan in place. The PEPs are monitored very closely by the Virtual College and the social worker every six months. Following the last review of PEPs, changes have been made to introduce a new ePEP system (an electronic database) incorporating Health information, Special Educational Needs (SEN) status and outcomes from Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs). A Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) of up to £1,900 per looked after child can also be allocated to the children to fund interventions to support their learning.

Our commitments will include:

- Providing access to education that meets the child and young person's needs and ensure that they are encouraged and supported to achieve their learning potential
- Promoting the child and young person's confidence and self-esteem to reflect their aspirations and abilities
- Making every effort to maintain educational stability and work in partnership with education establishments and carers to promote the child and young person's educational achievement

Support looked after children to attend 'good' or 'outstanding' Ofsted rated schools to enhance educational outcomes

#### **Better Health Outcomes**

Achieving good health for the looked after children remains a very high priority for the service. It forms an integral part of the child's well-being and development and this is recognised within the individual Care Plan of each and every child. It is a statutory

requirement for all LAC to have health assessments within their specified timescale as part of their overall Care Plan.

Our commitments include:

- Providing access to physical and mental health services that meet the child's needs
- Ensuring that children and young people are encouraged to lead healthy lives and make healthy choices
- Working collaboratively with our health partners to commission appropriate services to secure better outcomes

## **Support and Help**

Being in care itself can be worrying and unsettling for children and young people, that may be exacerbated by being some distance away from home (or sometimes vice versa). We will support all our children in care wherever they are placed and whoever they are placed with. Our commitments to ensuring young people are supported effectively include:

- Allocating a named Social Worker to all children in our care, or Professional Advisor for Care Leavers, and ensure that they visit frequently to establish a rapport and build a trusting relationship
- Promote access to an independent advocate
- Promote direct work with children and young people to provide the best personal support and ensure that they have clear information and an understanding about the events that led to them coming into care and their experiences of being in care
- Providing a Welcome Pack which includes essential information for children and young people when they become looked after

## **Participation**

Hounslow has a strong track record of effectively engaging with looked after children, as detailed earlier in this strategy. We will continue to ensure that our children and young people are provided with the opportunities to inform and contribute to shaping services and enable them to feel confident and empowered. We will ensure this is achieved by:

- Providing children and young people with the opportunity to participate in decisions about their lives, to contribute their views about services they receive and are kept well informed about matters that affect them
- Consulting with children and young people in the most appropriate way possible to ascertain their views, wishes and feelings
- Responding quickly to resolve children and young people's complaints and resolve dissatisfaction

## **When a child leaves care - providing high quality and timely permanency planning**

### **Young People Leaving Care**

The Council recognises that young people who are leaving care require considerable support to transition to independence. Significant improvements in the Leaving Care Service, following the inspection recommendations have since been made to stabilise the team, create additional social work management capacity along with a clearer focus on more purposeful interventions for care leavers. The local authority is committed to:

- Allocating a Personal Adviser to support care leavers
- Improving the quality and consistency of pathway planning

- Working towards providing early transition into the leaving care service when they turn 17 and providing targeted support for independent living
- Working collaboratively with Housing Services to ensure care leavers are provided with suitable living accommodation

### **Outcomes for Care Leavers**

The Leaving Care Service was identified as an area that required improvement in the most recent inspection. Morale was low and staff felt unsupported and disconnected from the rest of the service. A major overhaul of the service resulted in the team being relocated at the Civic Centre with clear lines of accountability and transparency. Significant improvements have since been made to stabilise the team, create additional social work management capacity along with a clearer focus on more purposeful interventions for care leavers.

The Pathway Plans have improved with the majority being completed within timescales, the recently introduced involvement of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to oversee the first post 18 Pathway Plan has contributed to improved care planning. Transition and communication across the services have also improved with cases being referred to the Leaving Care Service much earlier and joint work commencing between the personal advisor and the social worker well before the young person turns 18.

The service has been reconfigured to include multi-agency partners to develop a “**Team Around the Child/Young Person**” model including:

- Department for Work and Pensions (Benefits)
- Future Paths (Coaching for young people who are not in education, employment or training – NEET)
- Recruitment of a second Looked After Children’s (LAC) Nurse
- Adult Mental Health Social Worker – to improve transition between Children’s and Adults’ social care
- The establishment of the Virtual College
- The Grand Mentor scheme – providing post 18 mentoring support.

### **Placement Stability and Permanency**

The quality and stability of placements is one of the most important issues for children and young people. Placement stability is focal to the achievement of our strategy and continues to be a priority for the service. We will ensure we deliver our commitments by:

- Providing children and young people with placements which are safe, meet their identified needs and promote success in all areas of life
- Giving opportunities for children and young people to live in a family placement which enables them to develop strong attachments to carers, which last into adulthood
- Providing residential care as a positive option for the small number of children and young people for whom this is most appropriate
- Aiming to place siblings together, unless this conflicts with their individual needs and welfare
- Ensuring children are placed at reasonable distances from their family home (within 20 miles)
- Improving the placement stability of looked after children and ensuring fewer placement moves, so that young people are able to form long term, trusting and stable relationships with their carers.



## **19. Commissioning and Value for Money**

The Corporate Parenting Service has a range of commissioned service to provide efficient and accessible services that meet the needs of the young people. The LIFE project has recently been approved to provide supported accommodation to young people with a range of complex needs such as mental health issues or substance misuse.

Hounslow is working with the West London Alliance (WLA) to help deliver strategic priorities including tendering for semi-independent placements, Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) and external residential care. The aim of the combined purchasing power helps to improve price control and quality assurance and encourage more high quality providers to develop services in the West London area. In 2016/17 the West London Alliance is tendering the framework for Independent Fostering Agencies to establish a Dynamic Purchasing System which, in addition to enabling robust purchasing arrangements and quality assurance, aims to increase the number and quality of IFA placements available in the West London area.

The sufficiency strategy is in draft for 2017-20 and will review the provision of placements for looked after children and care leavers. It will set out the current strategic context, the profile of Hounslow's looked after children, including trends and projections and the challenges and plans to ensure sufficiency over the next 3 years.

## **20. Links to other Strategies**

This strategy is aligned with, and will work in tandem with, existing plans and ensure that these reflect and promote the priorities and ambitions for looked after children, young people and care leavers. This will further emphasise the importance of working collectively and establishing shared goals about achieving the best possible outcomes for children who are looked after. The list below identifies the range of strategies that will link to this strategy and these will be refreshed annually:

- Joint Children and Young People's Strategy 2015-19
- LBH Corporate Plan 2014-2019
- Hounslow Clinical Commissioning Group Commissioning Intentions 2015-16
- Strategy Action Plan 2015-2016
- Hounslow's Child Poverty Statement 2014 (This version is referred to in the above Children and Young Peoples' Strategy)
- Joint Health and Well Being Strategy 2013-17
- The Public Health Commissioning Strategy 2014-19
- Hounslow Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2012-15
- Hounslow's Troubled Families Outcomes Plan
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2016 – 2017
- Priority Improvement Plan
- Youth Crime Prevention Strategy 2016-18
- Youth Justice Plan 2016-17
- Sufficiency Strategy 2017-20
- MASH Action Plan
- Virtual College Development Plan 2014 – 2018
- Children in Care Participation Plan 2016

## Appendix A

### Hounslow Corporate Parenting Panel Terms of Reference

#### Aim

To ensure a structured and effective approach to corporate parenting in Hounslow that supports positive outcomes for looked after children and young people by:

- being well-informed about looked after children and young people in Hounslow
- giving consideration to the effect of Council decisions on children and young people
- listening to what children and young people have to say about their care experiences and needs
- being a champion for children based on the standard "would it be good enough for my child?"

#### Objectives

- To ensure that councillors monitor the quality of services to children and young people for whom they have corporate parenting responsibilities.
- To equip councillors as corporate parents to provide effective leadership and contribute to strategic planning processes.
- To ensure councillors have knowledge and understanding of how the needs of children and their families are met by the council.
- To ensure that systems are in place to meet legislative requirements and national guidance in relation to corporate parenting responsibilities.
- To promote corporate parenting responsibilities at the strategic level among all elected members in Hounslow.
- To ensure that Hounslow Council as a whole embraces corporate parenting as a corporate responsibility and considers the effect of its decisions on children and young people.

#### Focus

The corporate parenting function includes the following:

- Children and young people in foster care
- Children and young people in residential care
- Children placed for adoption
- Young people who are care leavers
- Disabled children and young people who receive short break services
- Education, employment and training of children and young people in care
- Health and well-being of children and young people in care
- Looked after young people in custody

#### Process

Effective corporate parenting requires knowledge and awareness of the needs of children and young people looked after and the services which they receive. The role of the Corporate Parenting Panel is therefore:

- To receive and consider accurate and timely management information reports on the numbers, characteristics and needs of looked after children and young people.
- To receive and consider reports demonstrating how effectively Hounslow is serving its looked after children through the provision of services and targeted initiatives.
- To receive briefings on new national and local initiatives designed to improve children's life chances.

- To gain knowledge of services based on direct involvement and opportunities to meet with and gain the views of stakeholders especially looked after children and young people.
- To develop the skills and knowledge of elected members and professional staff and officers working with looked after children and young people to provide effective learning and continuous improvements.
- To sponsor and support projects, conference and events designed to improve and celebrate corporate parenting including the LAC Achievement Events, foster carers' annual dinner, Healthy Living event, YES themed parties and LAC conference.
- To meet with representatives from the Children in Care Council and to attend the council as required.
- To ensure that children in care are welcomed and facilitated to attend and participate fully in the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- To monitor and review progress on the delivery of the Pledge to children in care.
- To receive ideas and proposals from children and young people and consider how these may be developed and put into practice.
- To propose ideas for development within any council department, building on ideas generated from within Hounslow and successful initiative from elsewhere.
- To evaluate service quality based on the above.

## **Programme of regular reports to Corporate Parenting Panel**

### **1. Regular Reporting (monthly to the Chair)**

- Action plans arising from Regulation 33 visits to children's homes

### **2. Exception Reporting in relation to:**

- Information about young people missing from care
- Numbers of young people looked after who have been cautioned, convicted or received a final warning
- Numbers of young people in custody
- Numbers of unallocated cases of looked after children

### **3. Annual Reporting**

- The education of looked after children
- Health care provision to looked after children
- Report of Independent Reviewing Service
- Performance information based on activity against relevant national and local performance indicators
- Annual report of Fostering Service
- Annual Adoption Agency Report
- Residential Service Developments
- Report of Youth Empowerment Service
- Annual complaints report
- Independent Advocacy report
- Reports of regulated services
- Care leavers report including Futures and Unaccompanied Minors
- Workforce reporting

### **4. The above programme is planned to meet annual requirements and timescales.**

Detail of reporting would be based on the provision of reports / presentations that meet a standard and concise format to include:

- Brief description of service and its aims
- Level of activity
- Performance evaluation

- Feedback /views of service users
- Information about service outcomes
- Cost effectiveness

**5.** Young people will be informed in advance of the agenda and have an opportunity to discuss and comment in advance of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Young people may request additional reports to be commissioned.

**6.** The Corporate Parenting Panel will commission further reports as required in response to issues raised by elected members and young people.