

# Children in Care and Care Leavers Policy 2016-2019

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Growing the right way for  
a bigger, better Peterborough

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## **Our Children in Care and Care Leavers policy**

In Peterborough we want the same things for the children and young people we look after as any good parent would want for their child. We want our children to:

- be healthy and happy in childhood
- feel valued for who they are and to feel loved
- enjoy learning and to benefit from the experience
- achieve their full potential and be able to fulfil their own personal ambitions and goals
- grow into well adjusted, emotionally balanced individuals who will experience positive relationships in adulthood
- become responsible citizens and be able to be good parents to their own children when the time comes

Our vision is that we will achieve this by providing the highest quality of care delivered through the services for which we are both responsible and accountable.

We want to ensure that the children who come into care, do so for the right reasons and at the right time in their lives. As such, we will be supporting the commitment of Peterborough City Council and partner organisations to deliver a robust Early Help approach.

To deliver holistic and robust support to our Children in Care and Care Leavers, it is crucial that we work with partner organisations who can provide expertise in specific areas of a child's life, such as health or education.

This Policy shows how we intend to deliver the Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy (2016-2019).

### **1.1 Legal framework**

- The Children Act (1989)
- The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review (2015)
- Sufficiency guidance (22(G) of the Children Act 1989)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015)

### **1.2 Local framework**

The Children in Care and Care Leavers Policy should be read in conjunction with:

- The Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2016-2019
- The Children in Care and Care Leavers Evaluation Framework
- The Children in Care and Care and Care Leavers Action Plan

Related Procedures:

The following strategies, policies and strategies will also support us to work effectively with the children in our care, and care leavers:

- Early Help Prevention and Demand Management Strategy 2015 to 2018

## **2. Values and principles**

In all our activities with children and their families, the child's welfare is of paramount concern. Children are entitled to protection from significant harm through abuse, neglect or exploitation. All situations where child abuse is suspected or alleged should be investigated and assessed thoroughly and without delay. Where assessment indicates a child is at risk of significant harm, effective child protection plans need to be developed and implemented.

There are unique advantages for children experiencing family life in their own birth family and, in most circumstances children's needs are best met by being cared for within their families. Children should be maintained within their own family with the assistance of family support services when necessary unless there are clear reasons why this might not be consistent with their safety and wellbeing.

When it is not possible for children to live with their own parents we will always look to extended family members to provide an alternative in the first instance. Only when this possibility has been exhausted will we seek to place children elsewhere and our first choice will always be a family based fostering arrangement as close to the child's own community as is possible and appropriate.

Where a child is in care, family contact will be actively promoted unless there are clear reasons why this is not in their interests and where it is possible that a return home to the birth family could be in the child's best interests this should always be thoroughly and actively explored.

The development of a working partnership with parents is usually the most effective route to meeting children's needs and maximising participation is encouraged whenever possible. This includes working honestly and openly with families and children. Services should acknowledge and respect the contribution of parents, carers and other family members, involve them in decisions about their children and recognise when they need support.

In Peterborough we have a very broad diversity of culture, ethnicity and religion. In all our work with children we must protect and promote their cultural inheritance, religion and racial identity. We must challenge racism and discrimination and do our very best to ensure that decisions taken about children's future care are done so with the right degree of reference to cultural differences. Services must demonstrate that they encourage mutual respect and meet a child's cultural and religious requirements within a framework that encourages children to maximise the social and educational opportunities available to them. Equally great care must be taken to ensure that parents from minority ethnic groups are not disadvantaged in terms of their level of understanding about their legal rights and other rights associated with children entering the care system.

Children should only be kept in care for the minimum amount of time that is required to make permanent and sustainable plans for them. Permanency planning starts from the decision that a child needs to come into care and continues until the child's future is secure.

Children are entitled to be listened to and respected as individuals. Children are entitled to participate, as fully as their age and understanding enables them, in decisions that affect them. We must ensure that children's views and individual needs are considered when making decisions that affect their lives.

Services will aim to reduce the involvement of children and young people in criminal activities and to ensure children are not deprived of their liberty except in exceptional circumstances, and in accordance with legal and departmental processes.

Young people leaving care should receive positive preparation and support so that they are enabled to participate fully as active citizens once they reach adulthood. Significant attention will always be given to preparing and implementing Pathway Plans with young people and providing support and guidance so that opportunities to engage in education, employment and training are maximised.

Disabled children should have the same rights as other children and the above principles will always apply equally to them.

## **2.1 Children in Care**

The term 'in care' is applied to a child for whom the Local Authority is providing care and accommodation, either by a Court Order or in agreement with the child's parent or guardian. Some children with disabilities who receive a regular series of short breaks are also classed as looked after.

A child or young person may come into care as a result of temporary or permanent problems facing their parents, as a result of abuse or neglect of the child or because the relationship with parents has broken down, or where a child has no one to care for them.

Many children in care are at greater risk of social exclusion than other children of a similar age. Going to live away from home is not easy and children in care will all have needs arising from separation and loss and the impact of disruption on their lives. Consequently, all agencies have a responsibility and a positive role to play in enriching the lives of children and young people who are in the care of the Local Authority.

## **2.2 Our approach**

Our approach will always be to support and enable children to be cared for within their own family whenever this is possible. This will mean that we will work with parents and extended family members in order to enable them to meet their children's needs including their need for protection.

In a small minority of cases, it is not safe for children to be cared for by their birth parents and in these situations we will provide the best alternative to meet the child's individual needs. This will normally involve an alternative family environment in the form of foster care.

Achieving the best for each individual child and young person that we look after requires someone to take personal responsibility for ensuring that their needs as children and young people are met. Childhood is a window of opportunity in a person's whole life and drift and

delay in responding to needs results in lost opportunities that can have life-long consequences. Our approach will always be to secure legal, physical and emotional stability and permanence for all children who cannot live with their birth parents. In as many situations as possible this will be through adoption but we recognize there are other ways that we can achieve the stability and security that children in care have a right to expect.

For the child in public care there can be a great many people sharing the parenting role. The danger inherent in this is that responsibility is passed around and assumptions are made that things are getting done when in fact they are not.

In Peterborough we will work hard to promote a culture where everyone takes their responsibilities seriously, where escalating concerns about our children is both welcomed and encouraged and where the Pledge we have made to our children becomes the standard against which we routinely measure ourselves - throughout the Children's Services Directorate, across the Council and wider Children's Partnership.

We will work closely with partner agencies, supporting them to play their part in ensuring that children and young people in care achieve their full potential. We recognise and value the contribution and role of other agencies and will work hard to develop a partnership approach, so that children and young people are supported and benefit from an integrated and coordinated approach and are able to participate in universal, mainstream services.

One of the key routes to ensuring we take our responsibilities seriously is through the Corporate Parenting Panel. The Panel embodies the parenting functions that most parents take on without really thinking about them. Good parents want to make sure their children are happy, physically and emotionally healthy and are having their individual education needs met in a way that will prepare them for life after school. They are keen therefore to ensure that their children will continue after statutory school leaving age to be in further education training or employment. The CPP can keep a watchful parental eye on all these elements of children's care and are crucial in terms of providing both support and challenge. The best Corporate Parenting drives improvements in both the service and the quality of children's experiences. It ensures that the Local Authority and its partners are working together to enhance the lives of children in care and care leavers.

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### **3.**

#### **3.8 Monitoring, Evaluation and Governance**

The Children in Care and Care Leavers Action Plan details the work that will take place to achieve these objectives.

The Children in Care and Care Leavers Evaluation Framework includes the indicators that we will measure to ensure that the delivery of the Action Plan is having a positive impact.

The progress of both of the above documents will be monitored by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

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## **Equality statement / EIA**

Your organisation should make sure that all children and young people have the same protection regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity. Your policy needs to state your commitment to anti-discriminatory practice and should explicitly recognise the additional needs of children from minority ethnic groups and the barriers they may face, especially around communication.

## **Scope of the policy**

This policy relates to all staff who come into contact with children in our care. This includes staff from Peterborough City Council, Schools and Health amongst others.

## **Dates**

2016-2019

To be reviewed annually.