

# Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017 - 2020

--	--	--	--



**South Tyneside Council**

## **Contents:**

### **Introduction:**

## **Section 1**

**Our Priorities For Looked After Children and Care Leavers**

**Children Looked After: The National Picture**

**Children Looked After in South Tyneside**

**What Children and Young People In Care Say**

**Multi Agency Looked After Partnership Sub Groups**

## **Section 2**

### **The Focus on Achieving the Priorities**

Priority 1: Our Children and Young People are Respected and Involved

Priority 2: Our Placements are Safe and Meet the Needs of Our Children and Young People

Priority 3: Positive Relationships and Identity

Priority 4: Our Children and Young People will be Supported to Improve their Physical, Emotional Health and Wellbeing

Priority 5: Our Children and Young People are Encouraged to Reach their Educational Employment and Training Potential

Priority 6: Our Young People Moving Into Adulthood Will Be Supported to Achieve Their Full Potential in Life

Priority 7: Improve the role of the Corporate Parent

## **Appendices**

1 Pledge to Children and Young People

2. Care Leavers Charter

3. Statutory and Legal Context to Corporate Parenting

4. Corporate Parenting Training for Elected Members

## Introduction:

All children, regardless of circumstance, need to know someone is fighting their corner, listening to their needs and doing what they can to provide support. It is our belief that all children should be provided with **the best start in life**, and this should be no different for our children looked after.

As Lead Member Children, Young People and Families and Corporate Director Children, Adults and Health we have a special responsibility to ensure that the Council acts as a corporate parent for all children in our care. This means, as a Council, we need to ensure each individual child has their own needs addressed and is truly being looked after.

By understanding and addressing the needs of our looked after children, we can turn around the experiences of them from challenging backgrounds by asking 'What would I want for my own child?'

This strategy sets out our new approach to providing services and support for looked after children and in South Tyneside. We strongly believe that our children and young people are the future of South Tyneside, and as corporate parents it is our responsibility to ensure we will deliver the best possible services for children and young people in our care.



**Councillor Joan Atkinson**  
Lead Member  
Children Young People and Families



**John Pearce**  
Corporate Director  
Children Adults and Health

## **Section 1**

### **Our Priorities For Children Looked After and Care Leavers**

Informed by what Children Looked After and young people say is important to them, we have identified seven key priorities which are at the heart of this strategy.

- Our Children and Young People are Respected and Involved
- Our Placements are Safe and Meet the Needs of Our Children and Young People
- Positive Relationships and Identity
- Our Children and Young People will be Supported to Improve their Physical, Emotional Health and Wellbeing
- Our Children and Young People are Encouraged to Reach their Educational Employment and Training Potential
- Our Young People Moving Into Adulthood Will Be Supported to Achieve Their Full Potential in Life
- Improve the role of the Corporate Parent

### **Looked After Children: The National Picture**

The number of children looked after has continued to rise; it has increased steadily over the last eight years. There were 70,440 looked after children at 31 March 2016, an increase of 1% compared to 31 March 2015 and an increase of 5% compared to 2012. The rise this year reflects a rise of 1,470 in unaccompanied asylum seeking children, compared to a rise of 970 in all looked after children.

In 2016 the number of children in foster care continued to rise; of the 70,440 looked after children at 31 March 2016, 51,850 (74%) were cared for in foster placements – the same proportion as last year.

At 31 March 2016, 56% of children looked after are male, 44% female and these proportions have varied little over recent years.

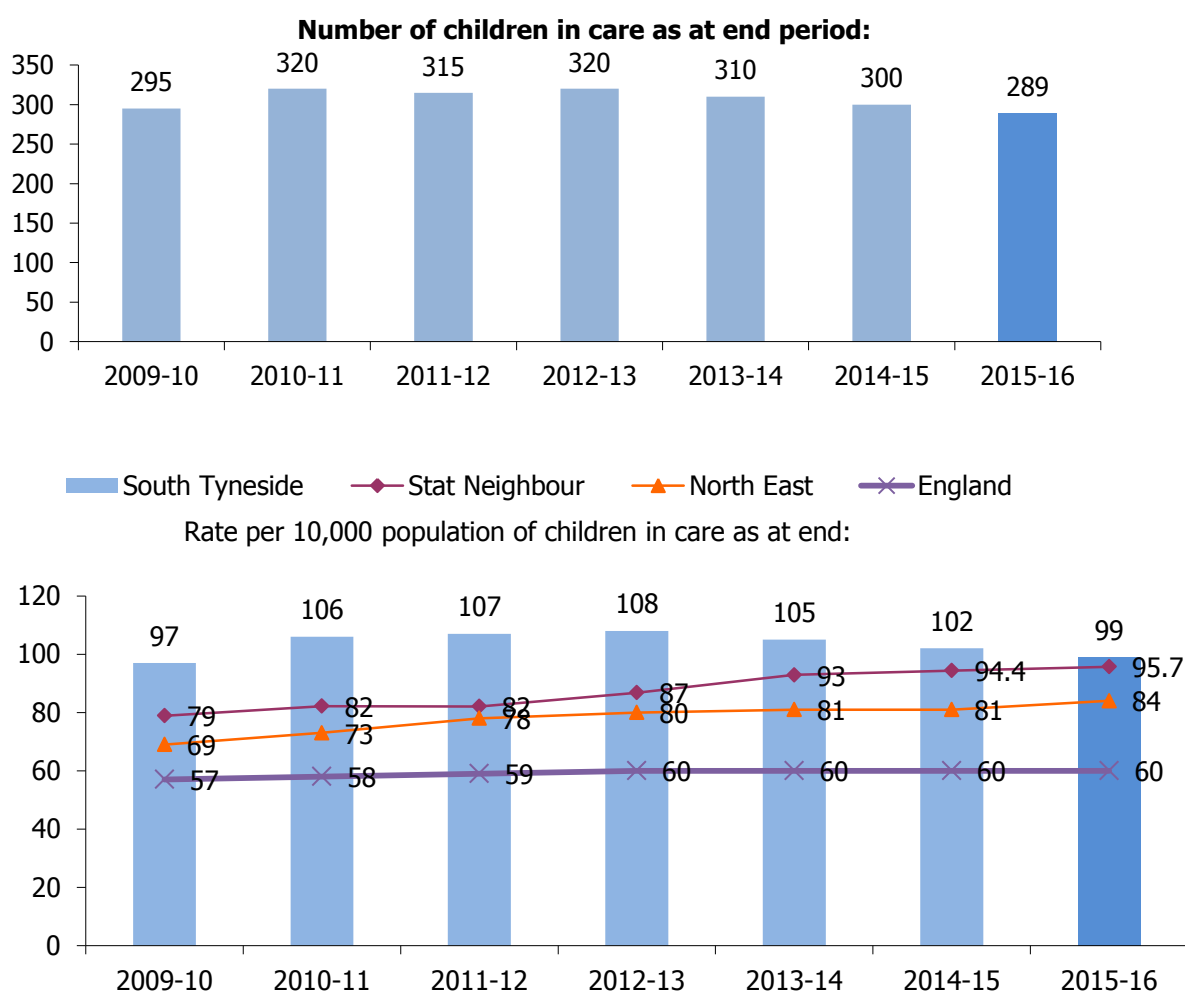
The age profile has continued to change over the last four years, with a steady increase in the number and proportion of older children. 62% of children looked after were aged 10 years and over in 2016 compared with 56% in 2012. There has been a reduction in the number and proportion of children aged 1-4 years (from 18% of the looked after population in 2012 to 13% in 2016), and a slight decrease in the number and proportion of children aged under 1 year (from 6% in 2012 to 5% in 2016).

Number of placements during the year

Of all looked after children at 31 March 2016, 68% (48,200) had one placement during the year, 21% had two placements and 10% had three or more placements.

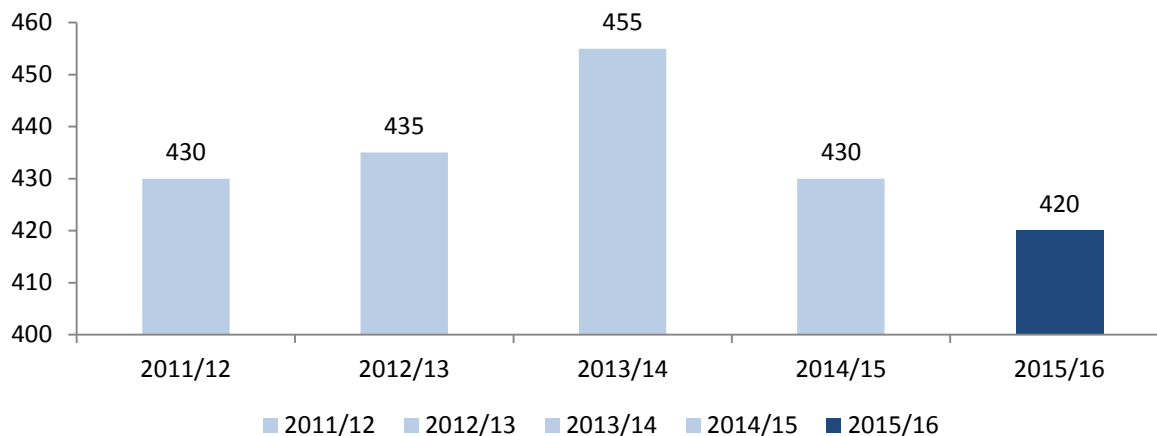
Children Looked After in South Tyneside

The position locally in South Tyneside differs from that nationally in that there has been a reducing trend since 2012/13. As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 there were 289 looked after children, down from 300 at year end 2015. The rate (98.8 per 10,000) remains higher than among the council's nearest statistical neighbours (95.7 per 10,000) in the North East (84) and England (60). Regional benchmarking based on 2015/16 year end shows that South Tyneside had the 4<sup>th</sup> highest rate of looked after children in the North East after Middlesbrough (120), Hartlepool (105) and Sunderland (101). The level of children looked after needs to be considered in the context of the number of children who are subject to child protection plans of 182 at the end of 2015/16 and a rate of children subject to a child protection plan (62.3 per 10,000) which is significantly higher than in England (43.1 per 10,000).



In addition to the reducing pattern of child being in care at each year end there is also a local pattern of reducing numbers of children being looked after at any point.

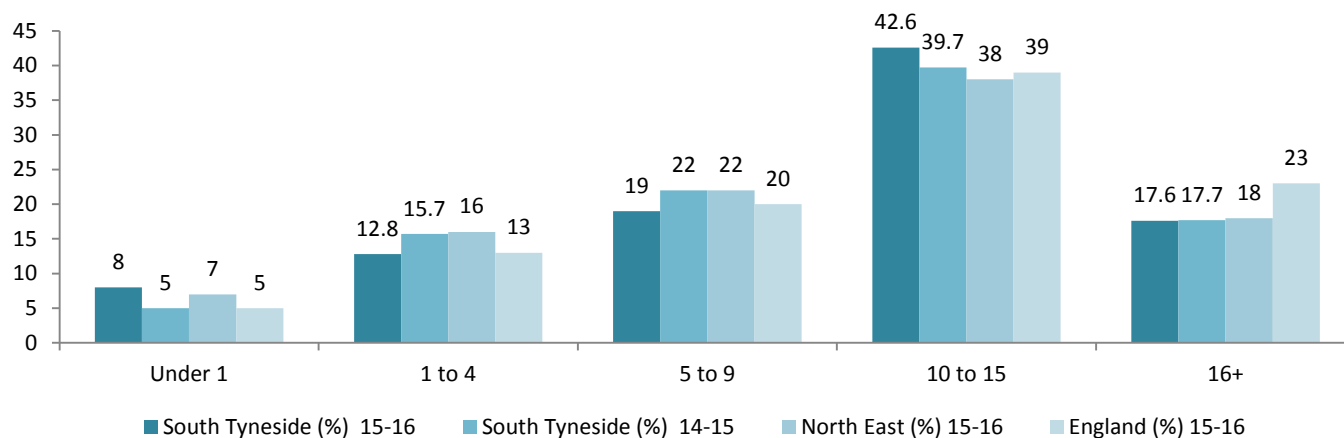
**Children looked after by South Tyneside Council at any point in year - excluding those recieved a series of short term breaks**



Contrary to the national position there have been no unaccompanied asylum seeking children in care at year end since this was recorded in 2010/11.

#### Age Profile of Children in Care at 31/03/2016

**Age profile of looked after children at year end**



	Under 1	1 to 4	5 to 9	10 to 15	16+
South Tyneside (number) 15-16	23	37	55	123	51
South Tyneside (number) 14-15	15	47	66	119	53
<b>South Tyneside (%) 15-16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>42.6</b>	<b>17.6</b>
South Tyneside (%) 14-15	5	15.7	22	39.7	17.7
North East (%) 15-16	7	16	22	38	18
England (%) 15-16	5	13	20	39	23

There were higher proportions of children aged 10-15 and under 1 in South Tyneside than there are nationally as at the end of March 2016.

## **Children becoming looked after**

126 children became looked after in 2015/16, a reduction on 2014/15 when the number was 130. 63% of children becoming looked after were male (79), an increase on 2014/15 when 54% were male and 46% female. 95.2% were White British. 73% (92) became looked after on a Section 20 and 27% (34) on a Full Care Order.

The most common age groups were children aged 10-15 (32% / 40 children) and children aged under 1 (29% / 36 children). The level of children aged under 1 becoming looked is particularly high when compared to 2014/15 when the proportion was 19%, and in comparison to statistical neighbours (21%). 21 of the 126 children (17%) became looked after at, or within days of birth, and a further 3 became looked after within less than 3 months of their birth. The most common single age group/gender was males aged 10-15 (26 children). These young males accounted for 21% of all children becoming looked after in 2015/16.

Unlike the national position, where more males are looked after than females, at 31st March 2016, 50% of children looked after were male and 50% female.

91% of children in care on 31 March 2016 were White British with 9% coming from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, a reduction from 14% at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015. The proportion is significantly lower than the picture in England 23% but similar to the North East (8%). The largest BME group was Black / Black British African at 4%, a reduction from 5% at the end of 2014/15.

In line with the national position of 74%, 73% of all looked after children at 31 March 2016 (212) were cared for in foster placements. 93.7% of children had less than three placements in 12 months which is better than the latest published national rate of 90%.

## **What Children and Young People In Care Say**

- Find moving into a new home a difficult experience
- Need to understand why they came into care
- Need to be able to build relationships with adults they can trust
- Rely on the adults caring for them to help keep them safe.
- Support to maintain relationships once they left care, on an informal basis
- Want professionals who provide support to have high aspirations for them
- Reported that leaving care still felt like a 'cliff-edge',
- Felt that the process of leaving care itself was often rushed and that planning for leaving care should start earlier.

- Wanted more choice about where they lived and who supported them;
- and what they were entitled to from universal services

### **Multi Agency Looked After Partnership Sub Groups**

- Arts, Leisure & Activities
- Education
- Training and Employment
- Health
- MAGIC – Children In Care Council
- Placements and accommodation
- Care Leavers – Themed Sub Group

### **How Corporate Parenting Works in South Tyneside**

#### **A Model of Effective Corporate Parenting**

South Tyneside has a well-established model of Corporate Parenting. It includes well-defined decision making processes in the council with clear links to the Children in Care Council (MAGIC). The Council regularly reviews how we deliver these functions and that there are tangible outcomes through active and regular feedback from the children and young people.

Delivery of the Corporate Parenting Pledge is monitored through the Corporate Parenting Committee and the Multi-Agency Looked After Children's Partnership (MALAP).

The Corporate Parenting Committee is chaired by the Lead Member and includes attendance of Elected Members, Corporate Director Children, Adults and Health, Head of Service, the Virtual Head and the Senior Manager Team to enable children and young people to be at the centre of the activity.

The Multi-Agency Looked After Children Partnership, is chaired by the Head of Service and is a multi-agency senior/responsible officer group that can plan, review, monitor and develop all aspects of our work in relation to our statutory and aspirational work with children in care and care leavers.

The role of the Corporate Parenting Committee is to take a clear strategic lead in ensuring better outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

The Multi Agency Looked after Children Partnership takes a lead on performance on behalf of the board.



The Corporate Parenting Committee:

- Oversees and leads on ensuring progress on this Strategy, making sure that all services provide support and take action to honour the pledges made to looked after children and care leavers
- Engages with children in care and care leavers to ensure that there is meaningful communication and partnership in delivering the pledge

The Multi Agency Looked after Children Partnership will:

- Oversee the Corporate Parenting action plan, monitor progress and agree actions as appropriate – reporting on its progress to the board
- Develop exception and summary reports for presentation to the Corporate Parenting Committee.
- Report on performance and activity

### **Vision and Principles**

We want every child and young person in the care of South Tyneside to reach their full potential. They have a right to be healthy, happy, safe and secure and to feel loved, valued and respected.

We want our children and young people to have everything that a responsible and conscientious parent would want for their children.

- We want our children in care and care leavers to work with us, along with their parents and carers, in shaping how we manage and organise the planning, resources and services that support and care for them.
- We want our children and young people to be happy and healthy, both physically and emotionally, to be safe and protected from harm and exploitation, and to be supported each step of the way to adult life.
- We want them to achieve their potential, including at school, to make the most of the learning opportunities they are offered and to participate in the decisions affecting their care and their lives. This includes making the transition to adulthood with continuity of support, access to the right jobs and higher education, while living in good housing and being financially secure.
- Our strategy invites us to work together with a common purpose, putting the welfare of our children in care at the heart of everything we do.

The principles are:

1. Safeguard the welfare, health and happiness of all children in care.

2. Listen and respond to children and young people's views and wishes.
3. Provide a stable and supportive home with caring consistent relationships.
4. Have high aspirations for each child and young person
5. Respect and value diversity
6. Place children and young people within families whenever possible and as close to the local community as possible
7. Promote contact with family and friends
8. Respect and promote children and young people's rights
9. Make decisions based on assessments of need
10. Celebrate children and young people's achievements

## **Section 2**

### **The Focus on Achieving the Priorities**

#### **Priority 1: Our Children and Young People are Respected and Involved**

##### **What We Will Do:**

- Ensure staff have the knowledge, skills and commitment to engage and listen to looked after children and care leavers in effective ways, appropriate to their age, ability and interest.
- Ensure we maximise the involvement of looked after children and care leavers in decisions made that affect them and provide feedback on any actions that are/are not taken as a result .
- Ensure that looked after children and care leavers are aware of their entitlements and know where to access information, how to seek advice and support, and understand how to make a complaint
- Ensure that the Council and its partners support MAGIC (and our wider Children in Care Council activities) and deliver against the commitments made in 'Our Pledge 2 U' and the 'Care Leavers' Charter'.
- Ensure that Looked After Children and Care Leavers' engagement and participation is embedded within each priority of our Corporate Parenting Strategy .
- Ensure we celebrate the achievements of all of our looked after children and care leavers
- Increase the number of looked after children and care leavers who are involved in our Children in Care Council activities

##### **What This Means in Practice**

- Looked after children are visited at least every 6 weeks and are seen alone.
- Contact with care leavers is made at least every 8 weeks, unless otherwise agreed
- Looked after children and care leavers are active participants in their review and meet their Independent Reviewing Officer regularly, and before each upcoming review.
- We provide a variety of ways for children and young people to express their views including independent advocacy.
- Having a strong and active Children in Care Council (MAGIC) which is able to help influence and shape the delivery of services through direct access to senior officers of Children's Services.
- Looked after children and care Leavers are regularly involved in the recruitment and interview process for Children's Social Care staff.

### **What We Need to Improve On:**

- We need to ensure MAGIC has a prominent position within the governance arrangements for looked after children and care leavers – with MAGIC included as a sub group of MALAP
- We need to develop our approach to South Tyneside's Children in Care Council, building on the existing MAGIC group and establishing a structured approach to engaging care leavers and younger looked after children
- We need to ensure that the views of young people are at the heart of the LAC review process and are sought in a timely and facilitative way.
- We need to improve on evidencing how we have responded to a young person's views and the difference this has made, outlining reasons for our response
- We have more to do to ensure looked after children and care leavers maximise their take-up of rights and entitlements through more accessible information available in a range of formats, including e-materials.
- Looked after children and care leavers engage in structured interviews at key points and responses demonstrate a high level of positive feedback on the services they've received. However, in order to make the most of this process, findings need to be systematically collected, collated and reported, to ensure this information presents an accurate picture and is useful in informing service development.
- We need to continue to develop our approach to participation and engagement, building capability across the service so that we can hear and respond to the voices and views of children, young people and their families.
- We need to ensure young people placed at a distance are regularly offered opportunities to engage with Children in Care Council activity, and are consulted on key issues relating to service development
- We need to build on existing celebration activities to ensure we recognise the achievements of the wider group of looked after children and care leavers
- We need to develop our approach to involving looked after children and care leavers in our recruitment processes, ensuring we create a sustainable and flexible approach that values young people's involvement.

### **Priority 2: Our Placements are Safe and Meet the Needs of Our Children and Young People**

#### **What We Will Do:**

- Implement our Sufficiency Strategy to help deliver improved options for looked after children and care leavers.
- Ensure that we have a range of placements available for our children and young people
- Visits to all placements at a minimum of every 6 weeks

- Ensure looked after children and young people have a variety of ways to express any concerns they have and act promptly on these.
- Placements changes are kept to a minimum
- Our Edge of Care offer will support children and families to live safely together through bespoke packages of intervention and planned respite care.

### **What This Means in Practice**

- Maximise permanency for children in care so as to ensure that where possible and appropriate, children in care are provided with stable placements via adoption, special guardianship or long term fostering.
- There are very few unplanned placement changes.
- Independent reviewing officers (IROs) meet with children and young people alone prior to their looked after review.
- A clear escalation process is in place to ensure that IROs can bring concerns to the attention of managers in a timely manner.
- 'NYAS' is available for independent advocacy.
- Concerns and complaints are responded to promptly and the local authority designated officer (LADO) is involved if required.
- A range of accommodation opportunities available for our young people and care leavers as they move towards adulthood.
- Social workers or managers visit placements, including residential, before moving children and young people to ensure the quality of the service they offer.
- Follow procedures and take a multi-agency approach when children and young people go missing ensuring that young people are listened to and action is taken to keep them safe

### **What We Need to Improve On**

We have more to do to secure sufficiency in our fostering options, particularly when placing siblings and adolescents, and to develop a bespoke offer for kinship carers.

- Increase the number of the in-house foster carers who are local to the South Tyneside area through an improvement in recruitment and retention processes.
- We have more to do in driving solutions for children and young people to enjoy choice of placement, including with their siblings, and are developing a Placements Service to focus on this aim.
- Sufficiency is a significant challenge and we have recognised the need to develop our placement service, integrating fostering, residential, edge of care and commissioned services to drive improved choice and range of placements.

Our aims for our placement service:

- Support young people to successfully stay at home through our edge of care offer

- Improve brokerage to improve choice and placement stability
- Increase the number of placements available including for sibling groups and adolescents.
- Reduce the number of emergency placements
- Drive a robust commissioning strategy including market development based on management insight and children's feedback.

### **Priority 3: Positive Relationships and Identity**

Children and young people are supported to maintain, build and sustain positive relationships with others, including their birth families, siblings in care, carers and their peers. Children and young people know who they are, why they are in care and understand their heritage. They feel valued by others, and their individual needs arising from race, culture, religion, sexual orientation or disability are understood and met.

We want to encourage our looked after children and young people to feel part of their local community and support them to be involved in a range of activities, including volunteer schemes and leisure activities.

#### **What We Will Do:**

- Children and young people will be encouraged and have opportunity to develop strong peer relationships
- Children and young people will be enabled to sustain family relationships with parents, siblings and extended family in a safe and positive way.
- Children and young people will have access to more specialist support if required to ensure needs are met.
- We will develop coordinated strategy with partners to increase looked after children and care leavers participation in extracurricular activities. This includes arts and cultural events and organised sports activities to contribute to better enjoying and achieving outcomes for looked after children
- Children and young people will know who they are, why they are looked after and understand their background and heritage
- They will feel valued by others, and their individual needs arising from race, culture, religion, sexual orientation or disability will be understood and met.

#### **What This Means in Practice**

- Where possible, placements are local and priority is given to children and young people to help them continue in the same school or education establishment where this is in their best interests.
- A permanency planning process ensures that early decisions are made and any drift is avoided.

- Extended families are always considered as part of the planning process and children are placed with extended family where it is safe to do so.
- Contact supervisors are able to help facilitate contact with extended family and siblings where appropriate.
- Contact with family and siblings is always considered as part of planning including Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Plans
- A variety of activities is provided through the year for looked after children and care leavers.
- MAX cards are available to support leisure opportunities for looked after children and care leavers. This provides free access to gym and swimming in the borough's facilities.
- A genogram is undertaken for all young people to aid understanding of their family and identity.
- Life story work will be considered with all looked after children where there is a decision of permanency.
- At the point of placement a robust matching process will be in place to consider issues of identity and belonging.
- Where there is not the same cultural identity for the child/young person within their placement, opportunities to ensure close cultural links will be considered and sought accordingly

#### **What we need to improve on**

- Increase numbers of local, available placements to maintain local links and retain relationships.
- Facilitate Family Group Conferences to retain, and where appropriate, strengthen family and friend relationships.
- Undertaking Family Group Conferences to help young people be part of a strength based approach and to help understand the dynamics of their birth family.
- Ensure children and young people placed at a distance have equivalent access to leisure and cultural activities as their peers
- Ensuring as much information as possible is sought from parents, family and friends at the early stage of Children's Services involvement.
- Continue to invest in our life story work to reflect the story of the child and help them understand their experiences and background.

**Priority 4: Our Children and Young People will be Supported to Improve their Physical, Emotional Health and Wellbeing**

**What We Will Do:**

- The health needs of children and young people will be assessed and reviewed in a timely way.
- Where required children and young people will have access to specialist health services including those related to additional needs or disability.
- Our children and young people will be encouraged to lead healthy and active lifestyles.
- Our children and young people will have access to information around the risks of alcohol, and substance misuse and the risks of sexual exploitation and be appointed through specialist services if required.
- Develop clear actions to ensure health outcome targets are met for Children Looked After entitlements to: good access to health services, including where required advice on, healthy diet, healthy relationships, promoting a healthy weight, and increased physical activity.
- Children and young people have their need for any additional emotional support recognised and addressed, are given the knowledge and skills to achieve emotional stability, resilience and self-confidence.
- All children coming into care to have a Child Looked After Health Assessment with a medical practitioner. This is to be reviewed annually for 5-18 year olds and 6 monthly for under 5 year olds by an appropriate health professional.

**What This Means In Practice**

- There is a good understanding when forming care plans of the support that needs to be in place to give a sense of security and belonging.
- Good attachments to be supported with key adults in a child/young person's life will be retained, and where possible strengthened, to improve sense of self and wellbeing.
- Young people receive a health passport when they leave care, which is a comprehensive summary of their health history, and support for adulthood; it includes registration with GP and relevant health services. Care leavers also continue to have access to the Matrix substance misuse service, if required, with a planned transition to adult substance misuse services at an appropriate point.

**What We Need to Improve On**

- Closer working practices between Health and Social Care professionals to respond to the outcomes of health assessments



- Responsive access to a range of counselling and therapies, if necessary, according to needs to ensure proactive support as opposed to 'reactive treatment'
- Health information is available with the child/young person to ensure knowledge and understanding of needs, particularly in times when there is a change of placement or circumstance.
- Identify ways for embedding the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) as a tool for assessing and evaluating emotional needs of LAC and using this knowledge information to inform reviewing and care planning and using this information to assist in service development.
- At points of change, or at significant times or anniversaries, good support is provided to the child/young person in a proactive way.
- Building the skills and experience within our professional networks to support children/young people's emotional stability and wellbeing, identifying the times and challenges when more support is needed.
- Identifying in care plans and pathway plans what supports may help a child/young person's emotional wellbeing and give opportunities to facilitate this, e.g. sport, hobby, musical instrument, etc.
- Give better recognition to the understanding of the link between health, school, placement and family, and an individual's own sense of emotional wellbeing.

#### **Priority 5: Our Children and Young People are Encouraged to Reach their Educational, Employment and Training Potential**

##### **What We Will Do:**

- Support Children and young people to attend school
- Ensure that all children have an effective, high quality personal education plan
- Track and monitor children's attainment and progress and respond according to individual and group need.
- Ensure that school moves happen only in exceptional circumstances.
- Raise awareness and train partners on the unique needs of individual and groups of looked after children.
- We have a multi-agency Education, Employment and Training panel which bring together expertise to support young people's aspirations.
- Young people leaving care will be encouraged and supported to enter further education, employment and training.

##### **What This Means In Practice**

- 100% of our looked after children and young people will have a personal education plan.

- Additional needs will be identified and where required a Special Educational Needs (SEN) intervention will be initiated.
- Placement changes will be kept to a minimum.
- The Virtual Head has effective monitoring and tracking systems to evaluate progress and achievement, and plans interventions to address emerging themes
- Children and young people's academic progress and attainment is analysed and monitored and a range of interventions are offered
- Looked after children access their statutory entitlement to full time education and attendance is in the good or better band
- School moves are kept to a minimum and where necessary transitions are carefully planned and the most appropriate education provision is secured
- Training including statutory support to Designated Teachers is delivered to a range of partners including foster carers and social workers on what works to support children's education
- Looked after children and care leavers will have access to work experience opportunities and will be prioritised for careers advice, training, apprenticeships and career opportunities
- The EET Panel will monitor the progress and create opportunities for young people entering further education, employment and training.

### **What We Need to Improve On**

- Good understanding by social workers on progress through school reports and educational achievements, and that looked after children and young people are rewarded accordingly.
- Embed Staying Put Policy to avoid disruption for care leavers moving into further and higher education.
- Improve the offer to children looked after and care leavers aged 16 – 25
- Ensure looked after children and care leavers are aware of their entitlements to financial support to promote their education, training and employment aspirations.
- Supporting the development of appropriate work experience and apprenticeships and enabling young people to access them.

### **Priority 6: Our Young People Moving Into Adulthood Will Be Supported to Achieve Their Full Potential in Life**

We know that transition into adulthood isn't always easy and for care leavers the transition can be more complex. We know how important it is that our young people are supported into adulthood in a seamless manner and provided with progressive and ongoing interventions. We want our care leavers to be confident and be able to access support and ensure that young people are engaged in education, employment and training and have the opportunity to live successful adult lives.

### **What We Will Do:**

- Children and young people enter adulthood in a planned way, with a home to live in, the skills to look after themselves and the ability to earn a living or continue in education or training.
- Ensuring entitlements are made clear to all care leavers
- Utilise the Transitions Panel to support the planning for young people from the age of 16, who may be eligible for support from Adult Services.

### **What This Means In Practice**

- Allocating a personal advisor to all eligible young people at the age of 16 who will work alongside the allocated social worker until the young person is 18. The personal advisor will remain involved until the young person reaches the age of at least 21 and continue to offer support up to the age of 25.
- Clear expectations to be in place, to help young people prepare for adulthood and have the life skills to achieve this.
- Opportunities will be given for young people to build confidence over a prolonged period for more independence and self-responsibility.
- A range of accommodation options to be able to be considered to facilitate plans for young people leaving care.
- Ensure all necessary information has been obtained for the young people in a timely way that will be needed when moving towards adulthood, e.g. birth certificate, National Insurance number, bank account, etc.
- Increase the number of young people in Staying Put arrangements

### **What We Need to Improve On:**

- Preparation for independence at an earlier stage for this to be built upon well before plans for moving are finalised,
- Accessibility and take up of health care and ensure young people are aware of the importance of dental appointments, staying healthy, etc.
- Improve range and quality of placement provision for young people leaving care aged 18 and over including options of supported and semi-supported accommodation.
- Set up a multi-agency care leavers accommodation panel to monitor the progress of care leavers accommodation plans, and identify themes and gaps with the intention of improving service delivery and strengthening multi agency working.

- Improve the quality of our pathway planning through having a quality assurance auditing process with a view to evidencing an increase in the contribution from our young people into their planning.
- Increase the numbers of care leavers aged 21 and over who return the service to access support.

### **Priority 7: Improve the role of the Corporate Parent**

Continue to improve outcomes for looked after children and care leavers via the further implementation of a corporate parenting and partnership approach to the development and delivery of services.

#### **What We Will Do:**

- At the core of everything we do is our understanding of our responsibility as a Corporate Parent.
- Elected members and council officers will take a lead role in raising awareness of the needs of children in care and care leavers with all council departments and partner agencies.
- Promote the role of all elected members as corporate parents and ensure that appropriate mechanisms are put in place by the Council to enable all members to fulfil their statutory responsibilities in this area.

#### **What This Means In Practice**

- The Corporate Parenting Committee meets quarterly and is chaired by the Lead Member.
- Training has been provided for elected members and is well attended.
- Listen to the voice of children and young people in our care, and those leaving care, either directly or indirectly, through national and local inspection reports, service user surveys, independent reviewing officer's reports, reports from advocates, and other professionals, and use what we learn to improve services and outcomes.

#### **What We Need to Improve On**

- An increase in the sense of corporate responsibility across all the statutory agencies in the support for our looked after children and care leavers, improving the impact of multi-agency support.

- Ensure good mechanisms are in place for challenge and counter challenge, between social workers, carers, young people, etc, to realise the ambition we have for looked after children in South Tyneside.
- Continue to develop the multi-agency looked after partnership (MALAP) to help understand the effectiveness of our Corporate Parenting approach.
- MAGIC (Children in Care Council) are active participants in the Committee and able to contribute and offer challenge.
- Raise awareness with all new staff employed by South Tyneside Council with regard to their corporate parenting responsibilities.

*This Pledge was designed by Children in Care, for Children in Care.*

## OUR PLEDGE 2 U

All of the people who are involved in your care want you to be safe, happy and achieve the most that is possible. We promise that we will always try to make decisions with you rather than for you and we will also make sure that we listen to you and understand your point of view.

**WE PROMISE TO:**

- Give you the best we can
- Do all that we can to make sure you feel safe and happy in any placement you are in
- Ask adults to listen to your views
- Support MAGIC (Children in Care Council) to represent the things you want to say
- Provide you with the opportunity to lead a healthy lifestyle
- Make sure you are visited by your IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) in private and in a place where you are comfortable
- Make sure you are supported by your carers to help you keep things that are important to you (for example birthday cards, certificates of achievements and letters)
- Give you a good education and make sure you have everything you need for school and college
- Give you good hopes for the future and support you to try and achieve them
- Help you grow and learn how to look after yourself in your future life

**WE WILL DO OUR BEST TO:**

- Make sure you are supported to develop good relationships with your carer
- Make sure, when it is safe to do so, you keep in touch with people who are important to you
- Make sure you are not living too far away from your family and friends
- Make sure you are supported with training and employment choices
- Help you fulfil your ambitions for yourself for the future

For more information get in touch with us:

 Claire O'Callaghan or Bev Hunter-Smith on  
**0191 427 2830**

 **ChildrenInCareCouncil@southtyneside.gov.uk**

 **facebook**

 **www**

## Appendices

### 1 Pledge to Children and Young People

## 2. Care Leavers Charter



South Tyneside Council

## CARE LEAVERS CHARTER

*The Care Leavers Charter is a promise that the local authority has made to us:*



### RESPECT AND HONOUR OUR IDENTITY:

Support us to develop our identity and at the same time maintain contact with our birth families.



### BELIEVE IN US:

Keep believing in us and encourage our aspirations.



### LISTEN TO US:

Listen to our views and opinions and if you can't do something, be honest with us and explain the reasons why.



### INFORM US:

Keep us informed and give us the information that we need at different points in our lives.



### SUPPORT US:

Support us, by being there for a chat and a catch up and don't judge us during times of crisis.



### HELP US FIND A HOME:

Help us find somewhere to live that is right for us, whether this is staying in foster placement beyond 18, returning home to birth family or living independently.



### BE OUR LIFE LONG CHAMPION:

Help us to understand what is happening when we leave care and guide us on the right path.

Complementing the Pledge, the council and its partners support the principles, values and commitments as detailed in the Charter for Care Leavers produced by the Department for Education and the Care Leavers Foundation.

The Charter for Care Leavers is designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good Corporate Parents. South Tyneside Council have adopted the charter and are committed to improving outcomes for Care Leavers as reflected in the charter.

Charter for Care Leavers:

We Promise:

To respect and honour your identity

- We will support you to discover and to be who you are and honour your unique identity. We will help you develop your own personal beliefs and values and accept your culture and heritage. We will celebrate your identity as an individual, as a member of identity groups and as a valued member of your community. We will value and support important relationships, and help you manage changing relationships or come to terms with loss, trauma or other significant life events. We will support you to express your identity positively to others.

To believe in you

- We will value your strengths, gifts and talents and encourage your aspirations. We will hold a belief in your potential and a vision for your future even if you have lost sight of these yourself. We will help you push aside limiting barriers and encourage and support you to pursue your goals in whatever ways we can. We will believe in you, celebrate you and affirm you.

To listen to you

- We will take time to listen to you, respect, and strive to understand your point of view. We will place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you, negotiate with you, and show how we have taken these into account. If we don't agree with you we will fully explain why. We will provide easy access to complaint and appeals processes and promote and encourage access to independent advocacy whenever you need it.

To inform you

- We will give you information that you need at every point in your journey, from care to adulthood, presented in a way that you want including information on legal entitlements and the service you can expect to receive from us at different stages in the journey. We will keep information up to date and accurate. We will ensure you know where to get current



information once you are no longer in regular touch with leaving care services. We will make clear to you what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see. We will support you to access this when you want it, to manage any feelings that you might have about the information, and to put on record any disagreement with factual content.

To support you

- We will provide any support set out in current Regulations and Guidance and will not unreasonably withhold advice when you are no longer legally entitled to this service. As well as information, advice, practical and financial help we will provide emotional support. We will make sure you do not have to fight for support you are entitled to and we will fight for you if other agencies let you down. We will not punish you if you change your mind about what you want to do. We will continue to care about you even when we are no longer caring for you. We will make it our responsibility to understand your needs. If we can't meet those needs we will try and help you find a service that can. We will help you learn from your mistakes; we will not judge you and we will be here for you no matter how many times you come back for support.

To find you a home

- We will work alongside you to prepare you for your move into independent living only when you are ready. We will help you think about the choices available and to find accommodation that is right for you. We will do everything we can to ensure you are happy and feel safe when you move to independent living. We recognise that at different times you may need to take a step back and start over again. We will do our best to support you until you are settled in your independent life; we will not judge you for your mistakes or refuse to advise you because you did not listen to us before. We will work proactively with other agencies to help you sustain your home.

To be a lifelong champion

- We will do our best to help you break down barriers encountered when dealing with other agencies. We will work together with the services you need, including housing, benefits, colleges and universities, employment providers and health services to help you establish yourself as an independent individual. We will treat you with courtesy and humanity whatever your age when you return to us for advice or support. We will help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger. We will point you in a positive direction and journey alongside you at your pace. We will trust and respect you. We will not forget about you. We will remain your supporters in whatever way we can, even when our formal relationship with you has ended.

### **3. Statutory and Legal Context to Corporate Parenting**

*The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* provides the overarching framework by providing the right of the child to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting him or her. (Article 12).

*Children Act 1989* is the primary legislation setting out local authority responsibility to children „in need“, including looked after children. Section 22 imposes a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of each child they look after.

*The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000* extended the responsibility of the local authority to young people leaving care, requiring them to plan the young person’s transition to adulthood and provide on-going advice and assistance until at least the age of 21.

*The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations and Guidance* clarify the expectations of care planning and review for looked after children and strengthen the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to challenge when identified needs are not being met. The manager of the service is required to prepare an annual report that should be made available to corporate parents.

*The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transitions to Adulthood for Care Leavers* gives details of how care-leavers should be provided with comprehensive personal support so that they achieve their potential as they make their transition to adulthood. It includes the need for care-leavers to be living in suitable accommodation and receiving support to continue in education or training and to find employment.

*The Adoption and Children Act 2002* required all local authorities to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to review the care plans of looked after children, and the Act introduced Special Guardianship orders that provide permanence for children but are alternatives to adoption.3.3. Local authorities have been entitled to expect other agencies to assist them in discharging their functions since the implementation of the Children Act 1989 (Section 27) but this was not a statutory responsibility until the Children Act 2004.

*The Children Act 2004* This Act introduced a duty on named agencies both to co-operate with the local authority (Section 10) and to ensure that they take account of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in fulfilling their own functions (Section 11).It also made provision for local authority areas to set up Children’s Trusts, bringing together the relevant agencies, and to develop a Children and Young People’s Plan. These are not mandatory but can provide a mechanism for bringing relevant agencies and plans together so that children’s needs are not lost.

*The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007* placed a duty on upper-tier local authorities and primary care trusts to undertake a joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) of their local population.

*The Children and Young Persons Act 2008* requires local authorities to take steps to secure sufficient suitable accommodation for looked after children within their area that meets their needs. It also strengthens the care planning process and the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer in monitoring the plan, and children's health and education plans are essential components of this.

*The Health and Social Care Act 2012* has abolished primary care trusts and transferred responsibility for commissioning local health services, apart from primary care, to a Clinical Commissioning Group consisting of GP consortia. Primary care and specialist services are commissioned by the NHS Commissioning Board, who are also responsible for holding the Clinical Commissioning Groups to account. The Act also established Health and Well-being Boards, led by the Director of Public Health within the local authority, to improve the health and well-being of the local population and reduce health inequalities. Section 12 created a new duty for local authorities to take steps to improve the health of people in their area.

*The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012* has introduced a single remand order for children and young people under the age of 18 who are refused bail, which will mean that they become looked after children for the duration of the remand, and may mean that they are entitled to leaving care services.

*Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and Well-being of Looked after Children* placed the contribution of NHS agencies towards meeting the needs of looked after children on a statutory footing for the first time. The role of the PCT was to analyse the health needs of looked after children, plan and commission services, and monitor and review their effectiveness. Strategic Health Authorities were expected to monitor the performance of PCTs and to play a developmental and supportive role. Although PCTs have been replaced by Clinical Commissioning Groups, the government's mandate to the NHS Commissioning Board for 2013–2015 says: We expect to see the NHS, working together with schools and children's social services, supporting and safeguarding vulnerable, looked-after and adopted children, through a more joined-up approach to addressing their needs'.

*Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked after Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities* clarified the duty to actively support looked after children's education. Measures include the priority that must be given to looked after children in terms of school admission, restriction on the use of school exclusion and the introduction of personal education allowances to purchase tailored support.

*Statutory Guidance: Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children* requires local authorities to develop a plan to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area and which meets their needs. They can only do this if they work in partnership with other agencies as the requirement is not just about accommodation and placements but also securing a diverse range of universal, targeted and specialist services working together to meet children's needs and applies not only to looked after children but also those on the edge of care and at risk of custody.

*Statutory Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services.* These roles are statutory and cover both the social care and education services of the local authority. These individuals should provide strong leadership and ensure that there is a clear line of accountability for children's well-being. They have particular responsibility for vulnerable groups of children, including those for whom they are corporate parents. The Lead Member should provide *political* leadership whilst the Director of Children's Services should provide *professional* leadership.

*The Equality Act 2010* places an additional responsibility on public organisations to consider the needs of Protected Characteristics (*age, disability, sex, ethnicity, religion and belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity*) and the effect of changes on them. This legislation also asks public organisations to support communities to get along better and understand each other. Both requirements are valid for adults and children.

*The 2012 Adoption Action Plan tackling Delay.* This plan explains the changes the Government has made to speed up the adoption system in England. The action plan sets out a range of proposals to speed up the process for adopting children; to overhaul the service for prospective adopters; and to strengthen local accountability for the timeliness of adoption services.

*The 2013 Ofsted Inspection Framework.* This document sets out the Framework and evaluation schedule for the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers (single inspection framework) and reviews of Local Safeguarding Children Boards).

#### **4. Corporate Parenting Training for Elected Members**

Elected Members have a responsibility to ensure that services for our children and young people are good and to ensure there are sufficient resources and accommodation choice. Elected Members have taken part in visits to Children's Homes, scrutinise services and have an overview of performance measures to ensure children in care are safe and services are effective.

All elected members can undertake training to ensure they have the knowledge to fulfil their safeguarding and corporate parenting responsibilities.

##### *Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice - A Handbook for Councillors*

With an emphasis on practical tools and training materials, the handbook will support the implementation of corporate parenting across the local authority by focusing on the leadership and commitment that members and officers can provide.

The book is essential reading for all local councillors and assists elected members and council officers to ensure that they fulfil their role as corporate parents.