



Southend Borough Council
Corporate Parenting Strategy for
Looked after Children
2018- 2019

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Introduction

This is a multi-agency plan that sets out the Council's and its partner's commitment to improving the lives and outcomes for Southend's looked after children and care leavers. The plan will support the *Children and Young Person's Plan*.

The Children & Young Person's Plan sets out the Children's Partnership aim to break the cycle of poverty, social exclusion and disadvantage experienced by Southend families and improve their quality of life.

The 'golden thread' linking the Plan to this Corporate Parenting Strategy recognises the role of Children's Social Care as a champion for the promotion of good life chances for vulnerable children. This strategy will support the Plan by ensuring that children looked after receive the quality of care necessary to achieve the best possible outcomes thereby reducing the risk of social exclusion and poverty once they leave care.

This strategy will help the Council to:

- Understand the current and future needs of children looked after aged 0-18 and care leavers aged 18-25
- Reinforce the corporate parenting responsibility of the Council and Partners
- Ensure that the race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, religion and culture of children looked after and care leavers are considered in planning to meet their needs

This strategy will be supported by Southend's *Sufficiency Strategy for ensuring sufficient accommodation for Children Looked After and by the Children & Young People's Plan*.

Partner agencies have been engaged in identifying key service challenges as well as priorities for future service delivery as set out in this strategy.

The strategy is supported by a multi-agency action plan which has been developed in order to assist the Council and the agencies responsible for corporate parenting to achieve the desired goals and impact.

2. Achievements from 2017-2018 strategy targets

Outcomes for children looked after

The *Children & Young Person's Plan 2017-18* and the *OFTED Improvement Plan*, identified a number of targets and actions. There have been significant achievements in relation to the plan that include:

- Improvements in the general stability of placements
- An increase in the numbers of children with permanent placements through Special Guardianship Orders or Adoption
- A improvement in timescales for children between entering care and being placed with an adoptive family
- An increase in the number of young people with a permanency plan in place by the second review
- An increase in the number of young people long term linked with their foster carers
- More children with up to date health assessments and dental checks
- The virtual school took a group of young people on a sailing trip to support working together as a team
- An increase in the number of in house foster carers offering local placements to Southend children

Local Standards and Targets

In terms of local standards and targets, Southend is doing well in the following areas:

- Placing children with relatives and friends
- The proportion of looked after children placed locally with Southend foster carers (65%)
- Long term stability
- Timescales for children being placed for adoption

Being healthy

- Close working with health to improve timescales for IHA's and engagement of older adolescents

Staying Safe

- 81.6% of the looked after population have good school attendance. 18.4% missed more than 10% attendance in the last academic year.

Enjoy and achieve

At Key stage 2

- In reading, 33.3% achieved the expected standard in the tests,
- In writing teacher assessments, 44.4% of the cohort achieved the expected standard, against 47% nationally
- In the maths tests, 44.4% achieved the expected standard in the tests, compared to 46% nationally.
- In 2016/17, Southend was ranked in the top 25% of all local authorities for Attainment 8 and Progress 8

At Key stage 4

15 pupils were in Southend's cohort for all looked after children at KS4 in 2016/17.

Southend improved in 2016/17 in those achieving level 4-9 in English and Maths and was above the performance of East of England and National Average.

For more information see Journey of the child annual report July 2018

Positive Contribution

- The proportion of care leavers aged 19 & 20 living in suitable accommodation increased.
- The proportion of care leavers aged 20 in employment, education or training continued to increase

The outcomes demonstrate a trend of continuous improvement over recent years. Most formal performance indicators show performance within the higher bands nationally.

3. Southend's Children Looked After and Care Leavers

Southend's demographics of vulnerable children

In 2017/18 there were 41,137 young people under the age of 18 in Southend. Of the 2017/18 figures;

- 11,329 were under the age of 5 a decrease of 72 from 2015/16;
- 11,855 were aged 5-10 years an increase of 662;
- 9939 were aged 11-15 years an increase of 308, with
- 6014 aged 16+ an increase of 1837.

It is estimated that by 2020;

- 11,501 will be aged under 5 years;
- 13,696 will be aged 5-10 years;
- 10,663 will be aged 11-15 years and
- 3,760 will be aged 16+.

If the estimated demographic figures are correct, then the Fostering Service needs to concentrate on placements for children aged 5-18 years, however the previous bulge identified of children 5-15yrs is now impacting significantly on placements for 16+ and leaving care.

The total number of looked after children rose to 291 at the end of March 2018 and further to 298 at the point of this report being completed.

Southend's children looked after and care leavers

Children looked after are made up of several distinct groups, although they have overlapping as well as specific needs. They include:

- Babies and younger children particularly 0-4yrs (39.8%)
- 16-18yr olds (11.5% a decrease from 27.6%)
- Disabled children

- Young People who are parents
- Young people preparing to leave care
- Care leavers from 18-25 yrs

Children looked after are a diverse group

Overall, the statistics for ethnicity have stayed fairly consistent from year to year, with only small fluctuations. Figures of children looked after reflect the Borough trends in general. The latest census trends indicate a changing demographic in the Borough with slight increases in populations from Eastern Europe, Bangladesh and China.

At the end of March 2018 however, 91.6% of the looked after population in Southend were identified as White British (a slight increase from 88.2%).

Care Leavers

There are a total of 130 Care leavers 18-25 supported by the Southend Care Management 16+Team (an increase from 111).

Children with disabilities

Eleven looked after children have severe and complex disabilities (an increase from 9). The transitions team can work with young people up to 25 years if required to ensure a smooth transition into adult services.

Children entering care

Comparing the last 12 months (2017/18) to the previous 12 months, there has been a percentage increase in under 1's and 16+, with a reduction in other areas. This ties in with the change in Southend demographics over the same period.

For more information see Looked after Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2018-2023 and Journey of the child annual report July 2018

4. Our Ambition and Priorities

Our ambition for looked after children and care leavers is that they experience the lives that we would want for our own children. In 2018/19 we will continue to work towards achieving this ambition through the delivery of one strategic objective that is to be a good and effective corporate parent.

Being a **good corporate parent** requires us to achieve the following strategic priorities:

Priority 1: Ensure Southend children are safeguarded

Priority 2: Ensure that the health needs of looked after children and care leavers are met

Priority 3: Narrow the achievement gap for looked after children

Priority 4: Experience of the family and child

Priority 5: Reduce the need for children to become or remain looked after

Priority 6: Ensure sufficiency of high quality placements for looked after children

In each of these priority areas, our aim is to narrow the gap in outcomes between children looked after and their non-looked after peers, whilst ensuring that the principles of fairness and choice underpin our actions.

To achieve these priorities, we must ensure that corporate parents, elected members and senior officials effectively champion and meet the needs of children looked after and care leavers. We must also ensure that those who have responsibilities for corporate parenting: the Executive members for Children's Services, The Deputy Chief Executive, The Director for Children, multi-agency practitioners and agencies working directly with looked after children do the same.

Being an **effective corporate parent** requires us to make the best use of the Council's resources whilst achieving value for money.

5. Our Priorities

Priority 1: Ensure Southend children are safeguarded

The current position

- a) Over the past few years there have been considerable changes to the monitoring of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and children missing from home and care. This has now widened to criminal exploitation including gangs and county lines.
- b) The Local authority have developed considerably the work with partners in respect of criminal exploitation. Services play a key role in ensuring that criminal exploitation is appropriately identified in both LAC and non LAC cases and also concerns are effectively addressed. There is an overall approach by the LSCB to ensure that all practitioners can recognise criminal exploitation and respond appropriately including having appropriate services. In addition the plan covers education and awareness raising with young people and the public.

- c) Statistical data is of an excellent quality allowing the Council to closely monitor trends and actions.
- d) Senior managers are involved in a number of regional and national groups, looking at criminal exploitation and are able through these groups to influence policy.
- e) Southend have established a multi-agency team (MARAT) where information is shared and plans developed for victims and their families at high risk of domestic abuse. The MARAT is embedded and functioning well to protect Southend children and adults alongside the MASH+.

Challenges

- a) Challenges remain in gaining relevant information from external agencies.
- b) Being a small authority, there are always challenges in ensuring that all legislative changes are recognised and implemented in a timely fashion.
- c) Driving forward change with partner agencies appropriately in understanding and working with criminal exploitation.

Corporate parenting role

How will we know this is being achieved:

- Services for young people at risk of CSE and criminal exploitation across the partnership will be robust
- Identification of and engagement with those young people most at risk will be seen to have improved

Reports to be presented to CPG:

- 6 monthly report on the work across the partnership in respect of CSE and criminal exploitation

Priority 2: Ensure the health needs of looked after children and care leavers are met

The current position

- a) The Council continues with its health partners to reduce the health gaps and inequalities between Southend’s children looked after and their non-looked after peers.

- b) The health service provided to children and young people looked after by Southend is compliant with relevant legislation
- c) Southend foster carers are trained where required to fully meet the often complex health needs of looked after children. Both foster carers and children looked after have access to health information, advice and guidance including confidential information for older young people.
- d) The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), provides a summary of needs and identifies areas for improvement. The JSNA assists the Council and their partners to meet their responsibilities for improving the physical and emotional health outcomes for children looked after and to respond more effectively to their needs.
- e) The introduction in 2014 of a Health Passport for care leavers was favourably received and continues to ensure that all young people leave care with a clear record of their health history.

Challenges

- a) There are continued challenges in achieving timescales for Initial Health Assessments.
- b) We continue to find creative ways to encourage those in the 16+ team to engage with the health services on offer.
- c) Ensure close monitoring of the mental health needs and emotional needs of our looked after children and ensure that support services are available to meet the needs identified.
- d) Identify and support looked after children with substance misuse problems and train and support our foster carers to manage their needs.

Corporate Parenting Monitoring

How will we know this is being achieved:

- All looked after children have an up to date health assessment and for those who do not, there is a clear reasoning behind this with actions in place to address this.
- IHA's are undertaken in a timely manner and where possible within 20 days of the young person becoming looked after. Where not achieved a clear picture is available regarding the barriers and work being undertaken to improve this.
- Ensure that the mental health of LAC is considered and appropriately managed

Reports to be presented to CPG:

- Monthly reporting of statistics for up to date health assessments and IHA's
- 6 monthly report regarding the work being undertaken to identify issues and to improve links with EWMHS to ensure a prompt and appropriate response to

referrals made.

- 6 monthly report from health on themes and issues plus positive work being undertaken to engage young people in health assessments.

Priority 3: Narrow the achievement gap for looked after children

The current position

- a) As a corporate parent, the Council recognises that it is crucial to support the education of children looked after and to encourage them to aspire to and achieve high standards.
- b) A solid framework for narrowing the education gap between children looked after and their non-looked after peers is established via the Virtual School, and multi-disciplinary education team and integrated within the Children's Looked After Service.
- c) The foundation for this framework is placement stability and placing children looked after locally. This has ensured that Southend's children looked after experience the least possible amount of disruption to their education.
- d) The Virtual School has supported the effective delivery of corporate parenting to improve the educational attainment of children looked after. The School supports foster carers and practitioners to become good advocates for children in terms of their education and assists them to understand their roles and responsibilities towards children at the key stages of their education. The Virtual School has provided information, advice and guidance to foster carers and social workers on a range of education related areas.
- e) Children looked after with complex needs are supported by Southend Education in partnership with Children's Social Care through jointly funded care and education packages and, where applicable, with Health partners.
- f) At the end of year 11, the work to support the continued engagement by children looked after in further and higher education has been undertaken by the Southend 16+ Team and the Virtual School who now take a lead with young people aged 16-18 years to encourage successful pathways to further/higher education, training and employment.
- g) The integrated approach to service delivery has achieved the following:
 - Provided consistent support to meet the education needs of looked after children
 - Offered greater opportunities for tracking and monitoring their educational attainments

- Identified young people who are achieving in the key exam stages and prepared personalised additional packages of support through targeted use of the Pupil Premium and through regular review of the Personal education Plans.
- h) Early years services are now working closely with the Virtual School to ensure that looked after children are picked up at an early stage, pre-school to ensure that their specific and individual educational needs are recognised with the support of the early year's pupil premium.

Challenges

- a) We need to ensure that our children looked after continue to have stable experiences in care which will in turn support them to have stable experiences in schools. The Virtual School has identified that some children who were capable and were predicted to receive these grades over the past few years, then experienced placement breakdown which had an adverse effect on their predicted grades.
- b) The Virtual School can now identify predicted outcomes for children at the end of year 9. We need to ensure that they are targeted to ensure that the support is in place to help them to achieve to their full potential.
- c) Understanding the barriers to progression for children looked after at key stages is crucial to improving their educational outcomes. This requires the key services responsible for supporting the education of children looked after and care leavers to better co-ordinate their work to ensure seamless progression routes for children looked after from the age of 3 to 25 and to ensure that this is reflected in the appropriate plans at key stages.

Corporate parenting role

How will we know this is being achieved:

- Statutory achievements at GCSE and A level's improve
- Three young people currently NEET are supported to start and maintain an appropriate apprenticeship or other relevant academic course

Reports to be presented to CPG:

- Receive a termly report from the Virtual Head Teacher on the progress and achievement of LAC including quality and compliance of PEP's; those young people not on a school role; exclusions and attendance.

- 3 monthly report from leaving care regarding NEET and progress against target set.

Priority 4: Experience of the family and child

The current position

- a) Southend has a pledge for all looked after children which highlights what they can expect from workers and generally from the Department.
- b) Southend aims to have the lowest staff vacancy turnover as possible to ensure that children do not have numerous changes in social worker- reports are regularly presented to senior management and to the CPG to show progress in this area and the targets set to achieve stability in the workforce. Southend takes a lead regionally in ensuring the availability of an experienced and high quality, stable workforce across the region.
- c) Southend aims to ensure that the voice of the child is heard. This is both through consultation and ensuring that there is a clear advocacy service in place that young people are aware of. Quarterly reports are received by the CPG from NYAS, the advocacy service which clearly identifies how the service is being used and the experiences of our young people. Where themes are identified, these are addressed by the senior management team and outcomes reported back to the CPG.
- d) Off line support groups are held for parents of children looked after and separately for those where children are on a child protection plan and changes to service are made as a result of their comments. Themes and concerns are shared with team managers and workers where appropriate to ensure that positive changes are made to presentation to families.
- e) The Young Experts Group (YEGS) encourages young people to become engaged in making future change to children's service.
- f) Embedding Restorative practice across the partnership

Challenges

- a) To get a wider range of looked after young people involved in Young Experts Group and consultation groups to ensure that the voice of the child is heard across the service and changes made following their views being shared.
- b) To engage with more families whose children are looked after or on the edge of care to ensure that their experiences of the Department are heard and taken into account when looking at service development.
- c) To ensure that the children's Pledge is fully integrated into everyday practice.

- d) To ensure that young people are represented at all interviews for social work staff in children's services.

Corporate Parenting role

How will we know this is being achieved:

- Consultation with looked after children will show an improving view of their experience
- Engagement of young people will increase
- Families will be report a more positive impact of the work undertaken with them
- Young people will be involved on a regular basis in training, recruitment and service delivery and their involvement will evidence impact across the wider council activity
- The social work staff group will improve in stability and ratio of permanent to agency staff
- There will be an improving picture on timeliness and quality of visits and plans

Reports to be presented to CPG:

- Termly reports on consultation activity in children services
- 6 monthly attendance at CPG of representatives from the YEGS group
- 6 monthly reports on staffing updates and trends
- Monthly target reporting
- Annual IRO report which includes feedback from young people
- NYAS quarterly report on independent visitors and advocacy work
- Report regarding the implementation and impact of Restorative Practice

Priority 5: Reduce the need for children to become or remain looked after

The current position

- a) Southend Council believes that children should be supported in their families wherever possible and that their families should be given extra support to keep them together.
- b) The Council has continued to develop and support effective multi-agency early intervention and prevention services to help more children to stay with their families
- c) Southend aims to identify families with additional needs at the earliest point and help them to address their need. Research has shown that getting involved early to encourage social and emotional development can significantly improve mental and physical health, educational attainment and employment opportunities. Early

intervention can also help to prevent criminal behaviour (especially violent behaviour), drug and alcohol misuse, teenage pregnancy and homelessness. Conversely, waiting for problems to take root and reacting late costs the taxpayer billions of pounds.

- d) Southend has piloted a number of innovative family support initiatives, and have developed a re-designed early help offer.
- e) The Edge of Care Team is now working 7 days a week from 8am to 11pm to support families including foster families where challenges arise. In the first six months this has received very positive feedback and will continue to develop over the coming year in response to demand.
- f) The Placement Panel has acted as a gateway to care and to the Edge of Care services

Challenges:

- a) The challenge over the coming year is to reduce the number of young people entering care, particularly those over the age of 12 years.
- b) To make sure that we can deliver effective early intervention and family support services to families experiencing greater stress due to the recession whilst operating in a challenging financial context.
- c) Embed further the Reunification Programme
- d) Embed further the newly developed Family group conference service.

Corporate parenting role:

How will we know that this is being achieved:

- Care numbers will reduce
- Children will return home where appropriate in a timely manner
- Children will achieve permanence in a timely manner

Reports to be presented to CPG:

- 6 monthly reviews on the work of the Edge of Care Team and impact of their work
- 6 monthly reviews of the FGC service
- Monthly reports on care numbers
- Quarterly reports on themes and trends of our LAC population and targeted audit outcomes to ensure that the right children are managed at the right level at the right time.
- Annual Journey of the child report
- IRO annual report

Priority 6: Ensure sufficiency of high quality placements for looked after children

The current position

- a) The looked after children's service has focused its efforts on ensuring that wherever possible children looked after do not experience instability and unhelpful placement moves. This is achieved through providing placements that are of a high quality and which promote the development of strong secure attachments.
- b) There are currently 109 foster carers in Southend including family and friends carers, and connected persons (up from 107) delivering family life to looked after children. A sustained programme of training and development is in place and reviewed annually to help carers to manage the emotional and behavioural wellbeing of the young people in their care.
- c) The support offered to carers, including the work of the Edge of Care team has been a key factor in maintaining the stability of placements.
- d) We continue to develop annually a comprehensive recruitment plan alongside the adoption service and constantly strive to improve timescales for this.

Challenges

- a) Research has identified that local placements generally produces better outcomes for children looked after whether provided by the Local Authority or the Voluntary or Private Sector. The exception is where there is a need for a specialist placement or for a child to be placed outside of their local geographical area. The challenge is to ensure that children placed further away from local provision receive equitable services where they are placed.
- b) Ensuring a sufficient supply of local placements is challenging due in part to the national shortage of foster carers. Robust recruitment strategies are integral to meeting this challenge.
- c) A key challenge is to ensure that children who come into care, particularly those who come in an emergency, are initially placed in care placements that are suitable and able to meet their specific needs so that placement stability is not compromised. Ideally the caring resources of extended family should be investigated before children become looked after, however the circumstances in which some children are removed from their parents can impact on the willingness of parents to work in partnership with the Council to identify extended family at the earliest opportunity.
- d) The timeliness of permanency planning is a key requirement to meeting the sufficiency duty and Southend's ability to recruit sufficient suitable adopters to meet the local and national need is vital if we are to meet the ever changing timescales set by government.

- e) Alongside this we need to continue in our work of developing a robust process for commissioning placements for children and young people.
- f) Ensure that reunification is regularly considered and where appropriate a robust reunification plan is identified and progressed in a timely manner.

Corporate Parenting Monitoring

How will we know this is being achieved:

- Concerns raised against foster carers or residential units will decrease
- More high quality local carers will be recruited to allow young people to wherever possible to remain local to family and friends
- Sufficient high quality adopters will be recruited to meet the needs of Southend children who require permanence through adoption
- Children placed out of Borough in residential placements are given the same level of care and monitoring as those placed in house

Reports to be presented to CPG:

- Annual Journey of the child report
- Annual report from the LADO on investigations involving foster carers
- 6 monthly reports in relation to placement trends and quality of external provision, fostering and residential

6. Monitoring and Quality Assurance

The Corporate Parenting Group

The Corporate Parenting Group (CPG) has provided effective leadership and direction of the work required to improve the care experience and outcomes of children looked after and care leavers.

The commitment of elected council members to corporate parenting in Southend has strongly contributed to the trend of continuous improvements for looked after children and care leavers and this commitment will continue, retaining a strong strategic focus on all issues that affect children looked after and care leavers.

The CPG meets 6 weekly and is chaired by the Director of Children’s Services, with membership being cross party and multi-agency.

The CPG will oversee the delivery of the Children’s Improvement Plan and monitor and review all services for looked after children and be integral in driving forward the changes identified in the children’s services improvement plan.

Measuring the impact of service delivery is central to achieving improved outcomes for children and reducing the impact of disadvantage for vulnerable children and young people. Southend has in place a strong quality assurance system that evidences whether or not services are being delivered effectively and is used as an effective tool to raise standards.

Our framework for quality assurance and service improvement is both reflective and proactive. By examining past service delivery against good practice standards and considering service users’ views about the services they have received we can measure the impact and quality of service delivery.

Our key performance indicators and a number of agreed local indicators are captured in our monthly Local Performance Data Set which is reviewed by senior management groups and by the CPG.

Our Pledge

1. We will spend time with you and listen to you

We will visit you at least every six weeks

We will come to see you where you are living

We will try very hard to visit you when we will say we will. We will phone your foster carer to tell you if we can’t and then we will come to see you as soon as we can

2. We want you to be fit and healthy

We will help you talk to your doctor and dentist and we will explain to them what we think you need and what your problems are. If you move to live with another foster carer we will tell your doctor and dentist.

If you are unwell or have any problems we will get you all the help you need.

We will tell your foster carers things they need to know about your health, like about anything you are allergic to.

We will make sure you have the right vaccinations as you grow up and we will encourage you to have your health assessments and dentist check-ups every year.

If you are at school you can talk to your school nurse but we have nurses just for our looked after children who will help you if they can.

3. We want you to feel safe

We know that we are all different in terms of where we grew up and we know that we all need different things to feel happy and safe. We want you to feel safe with other people, at

school and where you live. If you ever feel unsafe we will make sure you know where to go for help.

We will make sure your foster carers know how to keep you happy and healthy.

If you are happy where you are living we won't move you, unless there is a problem. We will also try and keep you with the same social worker for as long as possible,

If you do have to move, we will give you all the information we can about your new home and your new carers.

4. We want you to get the most out of life

Before you are old enough to go to school we will make sure you can go to nursery so you can enjoy playing with other children.

We want you to do well at school and we will work with teachers and make sure you have extra help if you need it.

We want you to enjoy your spare time in a healthy way. We can arrange free use of the facilities at some of the leisure centres in Southend, which includes swimming.

We will help you to stay in touch with your friends.

5. We will ask you what you want

We will ask you what you want before making decisions about you. If we cannot do what you would like we will explain why to you.

We will always try to keep brothers and sisters together when possible. If we think this is not a good idea we will explain this to you.

We will make sure you know your rights and what we should be doing for you.

If you do not feel that your views are being heard we will tell you how to get an advocate who will speak up for you. We will also tell you how to make a complaint if you need to.

6. When you leave care

We will make sure you have a bank account. We will encourage you to be sensible with your money and continue to save for the future.

We will make sure you have a passport. If this is not possible we will explain the reasons why.

We will talk to you about what you would like for your future, and help you to plan for this, whether you are going to university, into training or into work.