

Slough's
Corporate Parenting Strategy
2016-2018

Statement from Reach Out! Slough's Children in Care Council

We would like you to support us and have an understanding of the needs of all Slough's children in care, in all aspects of our lives.

We would like all corporate parents to ask us our views and listen to what we say. We would like you to keep your promises and follow through with the things you say you will do.

You should want to take your responsibilities seriously and do your very best for us because you make a difference to our future.

We want all corporate parents to treat us the same as they would their own children so that we receive the support, care and love that we need

Statement from Slough Borough Council and the Slough Children's Services Trust

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Commissioner for Education
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Vision

Slough Borough Council and Slough Children's Services Trust are committed to being outstanding corporate parents, championing our most vulnerable children in all that we do so that our looked after children are able to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives.

Introduction

Corporate parenting is about how the Council and its partners act as responsible parents for children living under their care. Success depends on how everyone involved councillors, council and Slough Children's Services Trust officers, school staff and health professionals all work together to be the best possible corporate parents for each child who is looked after, to advocate on their behalf and support them to live safe, healthy and successful lives.

As corporate parents we should be asking 'is this good enough for my child?' This means caring about looked after children as well as caring for them and nurturing all aspects of their development. We need to ensure that children feel safe and secure, are healthy, have stable and caring placements, and that we help them to achieve their ambitions, goals and aspirations. We want our children and young people to leave care with a sense of achievement, security and confidence, looking forward to their futures, where they are able to fully take part in the communities they live in.

Although the Council's statutory responsibilities to looked after children are primarily discharged by the Slough Children's Services Trust through provision of children's social care services, corporate parenting is the responsibility of every Directorate within Slough Borough Council and its partner agencies, and this will be reflected in the way all services are planned and delivered.

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Objectives

This Strategy sets out the key priorities for supporting children and young people in Slough who are looked after.

We will ensure that all councillors, and council and Trust officers:

- Understand their roles and responsibilities as corporate parents
- Scrutinise and challenge how services are delivered as a corporate parent
- Listen and respond to the views of children and young people
- Support children and young people to engage in activities which enable them to shape services to deliver the best outcomes for them
- Understand that children and young people can hold them to account

Priorities

If we make a promise to our looked after children we will keep it.

Our six priorities are based on Our Pledge: our promises to our looked after children (see Appendix 1).

Our looked after children and young people will be:

- 1) supported by strong and effective corporate parenting
- 2) enabled to reach their educational attainment
- 3) supported as they move into adulthood
- 4) encouraged to develop positive relationships
- 5) respected and engaged in planning for their future
- 6) supported to have good health and wellbeing

This means:

- All services will know their corporate parenting responsibilities and acknowledge this in their business planning and delivery
- All elected members will understand their statutory corporate parenting responsibilities and provide challenge and support to service providers
- All partners will recognise Slough Borough Council's corporate parenting commitment and will support its aims
- All looked after children and care leavers will know about Slough Borough Council's corporate parenting commitment and delivery plan
- All looked after children and care leavers will know how to complain about, or compliment, the services they receive
- The Corporate Parenting Panel will closely monitor the outcomes for, and experiences of, looked after children

Appendix 1 – Our Pledge: our promises to our looked after children in Slough

- 1) We will make sure that social workers take the time to get to know and understand you. We will make sure that social workers are friendlier and listen to you more.
- 2) We will help you to have the same social worker for a long time.
- 3) We will make sure that foster carers treat you the same as their own children, so there is no favouritism and give you the care and love that you need.
- 4) We will make sure you have access to and are provided with the right advice and support to ensure you are physically and emotionally healthy.
- 5) We will help you have a healthy diet (one of your 5 a day) and make sure you have opportunities to take part in activities that will keep you healthy.
- 6) We will help you to stay where you are living in that is what you want.
- 7) We will help you to get the best educational outcomes and have a computer to help support you with your education.
- 8) We will make sure you have the opportunity to take part in activities and hobbies.
- 9) We will help you to keep in touch with your friends and receive the right information about staying over at your friend's house.
- 10) We will help you to be involved in the decisions that are made about you and any decisions and plans that are made about your future.
- 11) We will help you to be involved in choosing your placement and to know more about where you are moving to, including being able to visit any new carers before you move.
- 12) We will ensure you receive the best advice and support about applying for college and university, applying for a job and for your future career.
- 13) We will help and support you to learn about budgeting, how to cook, clean and other independent living skills.
- 14) We will support you to find a place to live, that is safe and secure and is suitable for your needs. We will ensure we plan ahead to make sure that, together, we find the right place for you, when you move on from care.
- 15) We want to support you to have contact with your family and friends. If this is not possible we will tell you why.
- 16) We will offer you the support of an advocate or independent visitor if you feel that you are not being supported. Sometimes you may find it difficult to say what you want and you may want some support to put your views forward.
- 17) We will listen if you have a complaint or would like to praise someone.
- 18) We will make sure you can speak to someone who you trust about anything you are worried about, even at evenings and weekends.
- 19) If we make a promise to you we will keep it.

Appendix 2 – Who are ‘Looked After’ Children and Young People?

Children and young people who are ‘looked after’ are the subject of a care order or interim care order, children accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 for more than 24 hours, emergency protection orders where children are accommodated by the local authority, children on remand to local authority accommodation, or under supervision with a residence request accommodated by the local authority. Children in care also includes children who are seeking asylum and those who experience a regular series of short breaks.

A child may become looked after for a short period of time, as a result of temporary issues while their parents receive the required support, as a result of abuse or neglect, or significantly challenging or offending behaviours.

Appendix 3 – Local context

At 30th October 2015, 183 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 45.9 per 1,000 children). This is a reduction from 196 (49.2 per 10,000 children) at 31st March 2015.

Of this number:

- 128 (or 72.7%) live outside the local authority area
- 8 live in residential children’s homes, of whom 75% live out of the authority area
- 1 lives in residential special schools, of whom 100% live out of the authority area
- 132 live with foster families, of whom 76% live out of the authority area
- 3 live with parents, of whom 33% live out of the authority area
- 10 children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

In the last 12 months:

- there have been 20 adoptions
- 25 children became subject of special guardianship orders
- 161 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 3.7% subsequently returned to be looked after
- 37 children and young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
- 46 children and young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses of multiple occupation.

At the end of Key Stage 4 2015, the national figure for Local Authorities for children with 5 A*-C at GCSE was 14%. Figures for Slough were 10% with only one of the ten year 11's achieving 5 A* - C passes.

Eight others achieved at least one pass at grades D-G. The nine children who did not attain 5 A*- C were faced with numerous challenges including becoming a young parent, special educational needs and significant health issues.

Eight of the ten children achieved well against previous attainment and are now studying for A levels, college courses or apprenticeships.

This year a significant amount of additional one to one tuition in and outside of school has been made available.

Technological equipment, books, group tuition and teaching assistant support have also been provided. Predictions are that 30% of Year 11s will achieve the equivalent of 5 A*-C grades in 2016.

In November 2015, 80% of care leavers, aged 16-21 were in education, employment or training, the majority in education.

In March 2015, 88% of care leavers were judged to be living in suitable accommodation. The recent Ofsted inspection raised concerns around the suitability of some semi-independent accommodation, as well as the quality and range of supported accommodation on offer.

The proactive support looked after children receive to help manage their health ensures that the vast majority benefit from 'comprehensive and tailor-made health plans, which address their physical, emotional and mental health needs alongside issues relating to relationships and sexual health...emotional needs are understood and responded to.' (Ofsted p.22)

Appendix 4 – National context

Nationally, the trend has been a steady increase in the number of children and young people becoming looked after. There were 60 looked after children for every 10,000 children in England in 2014/15, up from 57 per 10,000 in 2009.

The outcomes for children in care and care leavers are poor, with research indicating that this group are:

- Over represented amongst the homeless population
- Are more likely to become involved in offending behaviour and are overrepresented within the prison population
- Experience drug and alcohol misuse
- Have poor mental health

However, despite complex needs and challenges many of this group of children/young people can and do, with the right support, achieve great success in their individual lives.

Appendix 5 – The Corporate Parenting role

All elected members and council officers share corporate parenting responsibilities, but each take on different roles.

Universal responsibility (Level 1)

The minimum expectation is that every elected member and officer within the council and Trust, in conjunction with members of the governing bodies of partner agencies will:

- be aware of the corporate parenting role and the shared responsibility for ensuring that the needs of looked after children and young people and care leavers are met;
- have some knowledge of the profile and needs of looked after children and young people in Slough, and how these may change in future;
- understand the impact on looked after children and young people of all council decisions;
- receive information about the quality of care and the quality of services that children and young people are experiencing;
- consider whether this would be good enough for their child; and
- ensure that action is being taken to address any shortcomings in the service and to constantly improve the outcomes for looked after children in our care.

Targeted responsibility (Level 2)

For elected members who undertake visits to children's homes (Regulation 33), and undertake visits to services or are members of the Corporate Parenting Panel; and managers

of children's services, their role will include the above but be more extensive. They will need to ensure, in partnership with those with lead responsibility in partner agencies, that they:

- are aware of government expectations regarding the service to children and young people in care and care leavers;
- have access to both qualitative and quantitative information on the service, and have enough knowledge to understand and evaluate this information;
- consider how they are going to listen and respond to the views of looked after children and young people in their care, and their parents and carers;
- have an understanding of the provisions and services that need to be in place in order to be an effective corporate parent; and
- continually take action, in conjunction with officers and partners, to improve the service and to ensure it responds to changing needs.

Specialist responsibility (Level 3)

At a specialist level, there will be key roles where corporate parenting is at the heart of an individual's role. For example, the Lead Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services and the chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel will need, in addition to those above, work closely to:

- provide leadership across the authority in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of looked after children and young people in care;
- ensure that governance arrangements are in place to implement any decisions regarding children and young people across the council and partners;
- undertake a detailed analysis of the needs of the council's care population and all aspects of the service required to meet those needs. This will inform the clear evidence and appropriate action planning to meet the identified needs of looked after children and young people. There will need to be a review process in place to reflect changing needs;
- ensure that the strategic plans of the local authority and joint plans with other partners meet the needs of looked after children and young people; and
- keep up to date with emerging research findings, best practice and new initiatives that should inform the direction of services.

In addition, the corporate parenting role requires the support of partners through the borough. Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 names those agencies (including health, police, Youth Offending Team and all areas of local government) which have a duty to cooperate to secure the welfare of looked after children. This duty underpins the arrangements for effective corporate parenting.

A good corporate parent must offer everything that a good parent would. A corporate parent must therefore champion the needs of children and young people in care and deliver the best possible outcomes for them. This includes:

- the provision of high quality stable care within appropriate homely settings based on assessed needs;
- ensuring access to appropriate health services;
- supporting school attendance and promoting educational attainments through the support of learning;
- being ambitious for children, encouraging and supporting their efforts to get on and reach their potential, through education, training or employment;
- encouraging access to a range of leisure activities;
- encouraging constructive and appropriate friendships and discouraging destructive and harmful relationships;
- encouraging and enabling appropriate contact with family members, parents, grandparents, siblings and extended family;
- celebrating children and young people's achievements;
- supporting children when they fail or make mistakes, and discussing this with them so that they learn and grow through such experiences;
- providing consistent support and being available to provide advice and practical help when needed;
- supporting children consistently so that they build resilience;
- being an advocate for young people and trouble-shooting on their behalf;
- providing financial support;
- listening to, taking into account and acting upon (wherever possible) children's wishes and feelings;
- remembering birthday's and Christmas or annual celebrations within individual children's religion and culture;
- helping children to feel part of the local community through contact with neighbours and local groups; and
- being proactive when there are known or suspected concerns or difficulties.

Appendix 6 – Corporate Parenting Panel

Slough has an established Corporate Parenting Panel consisting of elected members and senior council and Trust officers, chaired by the Slough Borough Council Commissioner for Education and Children. The main focus of the Panel is to ensure that services provided are of a high quality, and are effective in meeting the needs of looked after children and care leavers, overseeing the development of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, and ensuring that the tasks set out are completed. The Panel will undertake its role by regularly listening to the views of children and young people.

The Corporate Parenting Panel has reviewed its arrangements and agreed to revise its terms of reference, strengthening its focus and making it more inclusive of partners and wider council services who play a key role in supporting looked after children and care leavers.

Slough's Corporate Parenting Panel

Terms of Reference 2016-17

Purpose of the Corporate Parenting Panel

The Corporate Parenting Panel is the primary vehicle for Councillors and Non-Executive Directors of the Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST) to meet with key officers to discuss:

- councillor and non-executive director involvement and commitment throughout the Council to deliver better outcomes for children and young people in care and leaving care
- corporate parenting as a key mechanism by which councillors, non-executive directors and officers can ensure that services provided to children and young people in care meet their needs
- high quality care, nurturing supportive and meaningful relationships that encourage the growth of self-esteem, confidence and resilience; enabling young people to cope with change and difficult times
- the highest standard of education for all and consistent with the needs and abilities of the child
- opportunities and encouragement for self-development and keeping fit and healthy
- encouragement to take up hobbies, acquiring life skills and being a good citizen
- opportunities for the education, employment and training, including open days and work placements, apprenticeships
- assistance with the transition from care to looking after themselves, including the provision of suitable accommodation; and
- identify key areas across services where councillors and non-executive directors wish to see improvement in the outcomes for children and young people in care, and make proposals for improvement

Responsibilities of the Corporate Parenting Panel

The Corporate Parenting Panel should:

- ensure that all councillors, non-executive directors and services are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as corporate parents pro-actively, this includes identifying and organising education/training events for all councillors to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to be corporate parents
- provide clear strategic and political direction in relation to corporate parenting
- investigate, on behalf of all councillors, ways in which the role of corporate parenting can be improved, using examples from other local authorities
- ensure that councillors undertake their annual programme of visits to children's homes
- ensure that the needs of children and young people in care and their carers are priorities by councillors, non-executive directors and officers

- receive quarterly reporting of key performance and quality indicators (as set out in the Corporate Parenting Scorecard) relating to children and young people in care, and identify areas for improvement
- receive regular and/or annual reports on the level and quality of the range of services to children and young people in care
- engage with and support the work of the Children in Care Council Reach Out groups
- listen to the views of children, young people and their carers and involve them in the assessment and development of services
- champion the provision of dedicated, specialist council-based work placements and apprenticeships for young people in care
- promote achievement and acknowledge the aspirations of children and young people in care by supporting celebration events and activity days
- meet with Ofsted inspectors where appropriate for their input into inspections
- participate as members of the Slough fostering panel
- agree a work plan based on the Corporate Parenting Strategy priorities/Pledge to Looked After Children, reviewing progress, membership of the Panel and attainment of its role
- Report formally to the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet/Council as agreed

Membership

Membership will be reviewed annually by the relevant political groups, at the commencement of each municipal year. The Chair and Vice Chair are fixed, filled by those Councillors present in the below Commissioner roles.

- Commissioner for Education and Children (Chair)
- Commissioner for Community and Leisure (Vice Chair)
- Five Councillors (*All seven elected member appointments to the Panel will be made on a politically proportionate basis)

Other stakeholder and partner representation at the Panel

- Non-Executive Director(s) of the Slough Children's Services Trust
- Director of Children's Services, Slough Borough Council
- Chief Executive, Slough Children's Services Trust
- Foster carer
- Care Leaver
- Reach Out! representative (until such time as Reach Out! would like to attend – Participation Officer?)
- Housing representative
- Thames Valley Police representative
- Health representative
- Virtual School Head
- Head of Service, Young People's Service

Meetings

The Corporate Parenting Panel will meet a minimum of 4 times a year.

Each meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel will be based on one of the key themes within the Strategy (based on the Pledge), as agreed at the first meeting of each municipal year by the Panel.

Accountability/Governance

The Corporate Parenting Panel will provide a mid-year report to the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel setting out work to deliver the Corporate Parenting Strategy. This report will be presented by the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

The Corporate Parenting Panel will provide an annual report on its work to deliver the Corporate Parenting Strategy to Cabinet and Council. The report will be presented by the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Administration

The Agenda for each meeting shall be agreed by the Director of Children's Services as part of an ongoing Forward Work Plan for the municipal year. Administrative support will be provided by Democratic Services, who will arrange the meetings of the Panel, maintain the Forward Work Plan and publish the agendas. The agreed agenda will be despatched by Democratic Services five clear days in advance of the meeting.

An officer from Democratic Services will be responsible for the minutes of the meeting and their subsequent circulation. The minutes will be restricted to Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel and those listed under 'Other stakeholder and partner representation at the Panel'. Requests from non-members to view the minutes will be considered based on the request fulfilling a valid 'need-to-know' requirement.

The Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually by the Director of Children's Services. Any revisions must be endorsed by the Member Panel on the Constitution before approval at Full Council.

Appendix 7 – Reach Out! Group, Slough's Children in Care Council

Slough's Children in Care Council (CiCC) was first launched in 2009 and was initially set up as a forum for looked after children aged 11 – 17.

In August 2015, the Children in Care Council rebranded themselves and are now officially called Reach Out! Young people felt the new name best described the purpose of their group trying to help others; reaching out for others in need and reaching out for their future. Reach Out! represents every child and young person in the care of Slough Children's Services Trust and care leavers.

Reach Out! currently consists of two groups, one for 8 – 11 year olds and one for 11 – 17 year olds. A group specifically for care leavers is being developed and will form the third Reach Out! group.

Reach Out! is facilitated by a participation officer and is located within the Quality Assurance and Performance team within the Trust. There is a work plan to support the on-going development of the Children in Care Council.

Members of Reach Out! are supported to take a lead on the development of their group. As well as coming up with their own name, the group have decided on the frequency of their formal meetings, venue and roles that young people will be responsible for such as chair and deputy.

Reach Out! have led on the development of the new Pledge to Children in Care. All of Slough's children looked after have been consulted on what promises they feel should be made within the Pledge. Young people presented the final list of promises to Slough Borough Council's Corporate Parenting Panel and Cabinet in April 2016.

All of our children looked after are kept informed on the outcomes and achievements of Reach Out! via a quarterly newsletter called Reach Out! update.

Young people also take part in regional opportunities, such as the Berkshire Children in Care Council and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children. These opportunities enable Reach Out! to meet with other Children in Care Council representatives and share experiences and views on issues that affect children looked after.

Children and young people also participate in other opportunities that ensure they can contribute to the development of Slough Children's Services Trust, for example, assisting with the recruitment of staff for the Trust and also the new advocacy service.

In April 2016, Slough Children's Services Trust contracted the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) to provide an advocacy and independent reviewing service for Slough's children looked after and care leavers. As part of the contract, NYAS will also be supporting Reach Out! and facilitating a number of consultation events with our children and young people.