



West Dunbartonshire Council

West Dunbartonshire Corporate Parenting Strategy

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1. Introduction

West Dunbartonshire Council is committed to improving the life outcomes of every Looked After Child and Young Person in our care.

This strategy sets out West Dunbartonshire Council's responsibility as a Corporate Parent making sure that support is available to help our Looked After Children and Young People reach their full potential and have the same opportunities and advantages as children who are not looked after.

The overall aim of the strategy is to articulate the corporate responsibility of the whole council, through a commitment to new and established programmes and initiatives which reflect National and local policies and best practice. The strategy requires the active engagement of all service departments of West Dunbartonshire Council, of elected members and partner agencies.

2. Background

Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe;

"the formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of Looked After Children and Young People."

Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better (2007)

Effective corporate parenting will require a commitment from all council employees, elected members and partner agencies and is an authority wide approach.

Corporate parenting responsibility does not lie solely with those services which work directly with Looked After Children and Young People, but requires all departments to work together in order to achieve the best outcomes.

This responsibility for Looked After Children is laid out in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and its associated Regulations and Guidance. These responsibilities are reiterated in *Getting it Right for Every Child* (2005), *Extraordinary Lives* (2006), *Looked After Children & Young People: We Can and Must Do Better*, Scottish Executive (2007), *These Are Our Bairns*, Scottish Government (2008), *Core Tasks for Designated Managers*, Scottish Government (2008) and West Dunbartonshire Council's *Integrated Children's Services Plan 2009-2012*. These guidelines are vital in ensuring that Councils act as an effective corporate parent for every Looked After Child and Young person, actively supporting standards of care and seeking the kind of outcomes that every good parent would want for their child.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

The Scottish Government has recognised the need to give children the best start in life, improving their chances to reach their full potential. GIRFEC is a national programme for practitioners across services that promotes a shared approach to supporting children's needs. It encourages partnership between families and services in order to meet the needs and promote the well-being and potential of all children.

Well-being can be described by using the 8 indicators listed below.

- **Safe:** protected from abuse, neglect or harm at home, at school and in the community.
- **Healthy:** having the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, access to suitable healthcare, and support in learning to make healthy and safe choices.
- **Achieving:** being supported and guided in their learning and in the development of their skills, confidence and self-esteem at home, at school, and in the community.
- **Nurtured:** having a nurturing place to live, in a family setting with additional help if needed or, where this is not possible, in a suitable care setting.
- **Active:** having opportunities to take part in activities such as play, recreation and sport which contribute to healthy growth and development, both at home and in the community.
- **Respected:** having the opportunity, along with carers, to be heard and involved in decisions which affect them.
- **Responsible:** having opportunities and encouragement to play active and responsible roles in their schools and communities and where necessary, having appropriate guidance and supervision and being involved in decisions that affect them.
- **Included:** having help to overcome social, educational, physical and economic inequalities and being accepted as part of the community in which they live and learn.

Scottish Government Vision

"Councils and their community planning partners will fully understand and accept their responsibilities as corporate parents and governance arrangements will be in place to make sure that work within councils and their partner organisations is child-centred and focused on achieving the overarching outcome"

These Are Our Bairns (2008)

3. Looked After Children and Young People

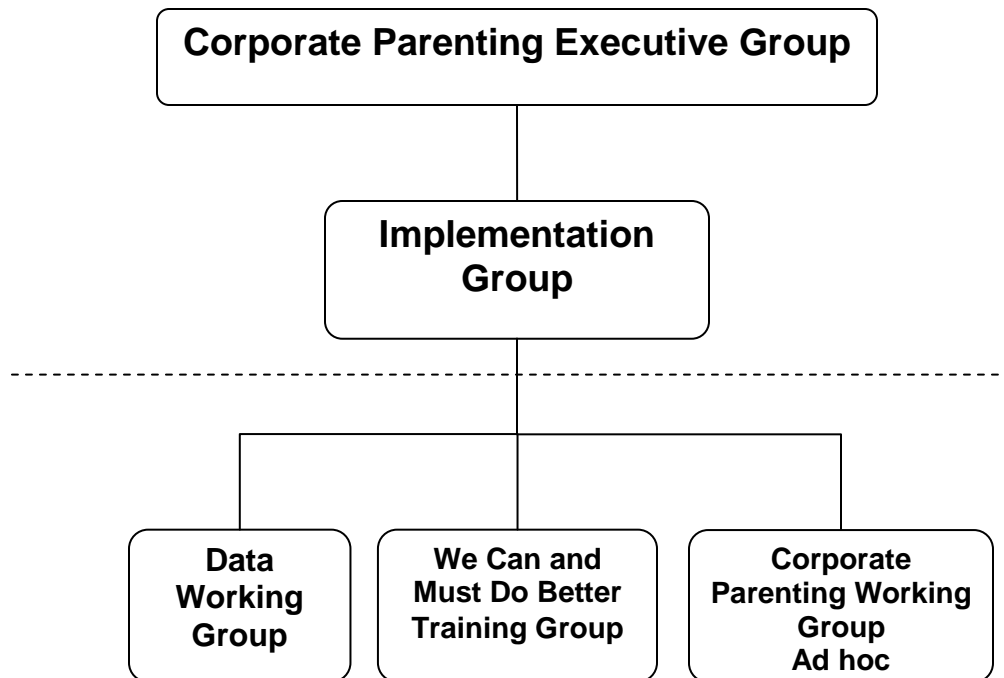
The term 'looked after' was introduced in the Children (Scotland) Act, 1995 and is used to describe a child or young person for whom the local authority has a statutory responsibility. Looked After Children and Young People include children who are subject to a supervision order and live at home with their family as well as children who live with foster or kinship carers; in residential schools or care homes; in secure care or being supported in leaving care. Looked After Children and Young People range from new born infants to young people in their late teens.

4. The Picture in West Dunbartonshire

Accommodation Type/Age	0-1	1-4	5-11	12-15	16-17	18	19-21	Total
At home with parents	0	28	68	75	12	0	0	183
With friends/relatives	1	23	32	6	1	0	0	63
With foster carers provided by Local Authority	4	11	30	20	4	0	0	69
With foster carers purchased by Local Authority	0	0	9	2	0	0	0	11
With prospective adopters	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
In other community	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
In Local Authority home	0	0	0	13	6	0	0	19
In voluntary school	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
In residential home	0	0	2	15	2	0	0	19
In secure accommodation	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	5
Other residential	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	5
Total	5	62	142	139	29	0	0	377

5. Developing and Implementing the Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Corporate Parenting Executive Group and a number of working groups were created to develop a strategic vision and the operational support to realise that vision. Each department within the Council is represented on the Corporate Parenting Executive Group and the multi agency make up of the working groups ensures corporate commitment.



Corporate Parenting Executive Group

This group is chaired by the Chief Executive and membership of the group is made up of senior council officers and elected members. Its task is to monitor the creation and implementation of the Corporate Parenting strategy.

Implementation Group

This group consists of council officers and representatives from the Community Health Partnership who are directly involved in the daily lives of Looked After Children and Young People. This group has worked on implementing the actions required by the “We Can and Must Do Better” report.

Data Working Group

This group was created to ensure the accurate recording, monitoring and appropriate sharing of all information relating to Looked After Children and Young People in West Dunbartonshire.

We Can and Must Do Better Training Group

This group is responsible for developing and implementing a training programme based on the excellent DVD produced by the Scottish Government. The group will also be responsible for evaluating the roll out of the programme within each of the services involved.

6. Strategy: Aims and Outcomes

Aims

This strategy aims to improve the life outcomes of all of West Dunbartonshire's Looked After Children and Young People through the use of a holistic approach to delivery of services.

In order to achieve this we will:

- Provide our young people with the high quality care and support all young people are entitled to, appropriate to their individual needs.
- Be ambitious for our young people and encourage them in their efforts to reach their full potential.
- Support our young people to gain, and support them in sustaining, education, employment or training post 16 years.
- Ensure our young people are supported to access appropriate health services.
- Ensure our young people are supported to access universal services, including leisure and cultural services.
- Recognise and celebrate the achievements of our young people.
- Ensure that there are regular consultations with young people and they are encouraged to participate in developing policies and strategies that directly affect them.
- Ensure that support is available to all young people leaving care.

Outcomes

This strategy will support those working to provide better outcomes for our Looked After Children. The outcomes of our strategy will be as follows:

- All elected members and senior officers of the Council will recognise and fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- Council policies and strategies will reflect the needs of our Looked After Children and Young People
- The life chances of our Looked After Children and Young People will be improved as a result of our commitment to corporate parenting.
- Our Looked After Children and Young People will become
 - Confident Individuals
 - Effective Contributors
 - Responsible Citizens
 - Successful Learners
- Our Looked After Children and Young People will develop skills for learning, life and work and achieve sustained positive destinations.
- Our Looked After Children and Young People will have the opportunity to actively enjoy a wide range of cultural, social and leisure pursuits and activities.
- The health and well being of our Looked After Children and Young People will be as good as other children and young people within West Dunbartonshire.
- Our Looked After Children and Young People will feel that they have been consulted and have influenced services and decisions which affect them.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

Elected Members

As Corporate Parents, Elected Members take responsibility for promoting the highest standards of care for Looked After Children and Young People and actively seek high quality outcomes for them. There should be a clear understanding by Elected Members of their role as Corporate Parents. They should be supported in discharging this role and should have available the necessary information to ask

key questions regarding the care, education, health and wider opportunities of our Looked After Children and Young People. In order for our Elected Members to be fully aware of the opinions of our Looked After Children and Young People, there should be a vehicle for dialogue between Elected Members and the children in their care.

Chief Executive and Corporate Parenting Executive Group

The Chief Executive has an important leadership role in ensuring the delivery of our Corporate Parenting Strategy. The effectiveness of our corporate parenting will be scrutinised by The Corporate Parenting Executive Group which will ensure that there are mechanisms in place to monitor and report on the progress of our Looked After Children and Young People and ensure that resources are available to help us fulfil our duties as corporate parents.

Social Work and Health

The Department of Social Work and Health has responsibility for supporting vulnerable groups of people across the Council.

The lead responsibility for Looked After Children lies with Children and Families Services through area based team services in Clydebank and Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven. A centralised Child Care Team also supports the needs of Looked After Children. These services ensure that the Local Authority fulfils its legislative duties towards Looked After Children, with the support of partners within and outwith the authority.

This collaborative approach is essential given that the needs of Looked After Children can be diverse and complex, requiring supports that are timely, targeted and co-ordinated. Children and Families Services have responsibility for ensuring that all Looked After Children have a comprehensive assessment and individualised careplan. This sets out the particular needs of the child and allocates responsibility for fulfilling these needs within a reasonable timeframe. All Looked After Children will have an allocated worker with responsibility for co-ordinating this process.

All Looked After Children are subject to statutory reviews as required by the Looked After Children Regulations. The frequency of reviews will vary, but the statutory minimum is six weeks after the child becomes Looked After and six monthly thereafter. In West Dunbartonshire, these reviews normally take place on a three monthly basis, as this timescale better meets the evolving and changing needs of this vulnerable group.

Children and Families Services take lead responsibility for calling and

co-ordinating Looked After Children reviews.

Throughcare and Aftercare Services

Throughcare is the ongoing preparation and support for young people who have been Looked After and will be making the transition to live more independently. The start of this process will depend on the young person's individual needs, personal circumstances, level of maturity and emotional development.

The support needs of this group of young people should be identified in a Pathway Plan, which the young person has been actively involved in developing. Supporting a young person's Pathway Plan will normally require the involvement of a number of agencies and partners within and outwith the Council.

Aftercare is the continuing support, planning and guidance for a young person who has left care or a supported living environment. This support covers areas including: further education, training, employment, health issues, personal, social and life skills.

Looked After Children are a priority group for the Council's More Choices, More Chances Strategy, and Looked After Children reviews for this group of young people should ensure that they are linked in to the range of options which are available under this strategy.

Educational Services

Education is a fundamental entitlement, and often the key to better life outcomes. It is a universal service which must also provide targeted support for vulnerable children and young people. A positive experience of education and the development of skills for learning, life and work can influence future success, engagement with society, health and well being.

All staff in Educational Services have an important role as Corporate Parents. They also have unique opportunities to support and guide children and young people through everyday interactions and relationships established over time. For some Looked After Children and Young People, their time in nursery or school may be when they feel most supported, safe and valued.

To carry out their role as Corporate Parents successfully, staff within Educational Services need to understand the needs and experiences of Looked After Children and to work in partnership with others to provide timely, effective and proportionate interventions. Expectations must be high but support must take account of individual additional support needs making reasonable adjustments as appropriate.

All schools and nurseries have a designated senior manager with specific responsibility for Looked After Children and Young People. Their responsibility is to support and guide staff, and to make links with the wider multi-agency network. Effective communication and information sharing, within the agreed confidentiality framework, lead to better outcomes.

Education staff also have a role in supporting children and young people to engage in cultural, social and leisure activities within the community. These wider experiences and opportunities for achievement can promote confidence and increase self esteem.

Children and young people who are Looked After will have a range of experiences of family life and relationships. Developing links between education and parents or carers can often alleviate worries for children and remove barriers to successful engagement in learning.

Educational services and schools have a responsibility to monitor, track and record the progress, achievement and engagement of children and young people who are Looked After and to ensure appropriate targeting of resources to meet individual needs.

Encouraging all young people to stay in learning post-16 is the best way of ensuring their long-term employability and contribution to society. 16+ Learning Choices is the model for supporting this within Curriculum for Excellence. West Dunbartonshire Council is a pilot authority for 16+ Learning Choices, which is a vehicle for transition from compulsory education into post 16 learning.

West Dunbartonshire Council is working with the Scottish Government and our partners to ensure that every young person has an appropriate learning offer made to them, well before they reach school leaving age.

For our young people to have a successful post 16 learning experience:

- The right learning provision must be in place.
- The right financial support must be available to ensure that young people make choices based on the most appropriate learning for them.
- The right information, advice and guidance must be available to make sure that young people know what opportunities are on offer.

Skills Development Scotland (Careers) work closely with our schools and colleagues who work with young people to ensure that those young people nearing school leaving age have access to appropriate and relevant information, advice and guidance on how to take the next step after leaving school.

Health Services

In West Dunbartonshire, the role of the LAAC Nurse is important in ensuring that our children and young people who are Looked After away from home are supported in accessing all local health services.

Due to disruption in their lives, many of our Looked After Children and Young People have had poorer health care than should have been the case. They may also remain reluctant to engage with health services and as a consequence have much poorer health than their peers. *The Action Framework for Children and Young People* (Scottish Executive 2007) stated that 40% of children in care will have mental or emotional health problems.

Appropriate tracking and referral protocols and effective communication channels between agencies is fundamental in ensuring that children receive the Health intervention they need.

Improving the physical and emotional health of Looked After Children and Young People is one of our highest priorities. The health of some Looked After Children and Young People may have been poorly attended to before entering the care system and we therefore have an obligation to address this deficit.

Housing

Our environment and where we live has an impact on all aspects of our lives and Looked After Young People are no different.

All staff within Housing should be aware of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities and ensure these are considered when housing supports are put in place for Looked After Children and their families.

Where there is an issue of anti-social behaviour within a family, care should be taken to find out if children in the family are on supervision orders and, along with colleagues from other departments, seek to have appropriate supports put in place.

For some care leavers, the transition from being Looked After to independent living is a huge step. Successfully managing this transition can be a major factor in how well that young person will cope later and it is the Council's responsibility, along with relevant partners, to make sure the accommodation secured meets the needs of the young person. Because living independently is far more than just about having somewhere to stay, it is important that we provide our young people with the necessary skills to cope. Housing staff should work closely with our

Throughcare service to ensure the care leaver has the support network available to help sustain a tenancy or placement.

Leisure and Cultural Services

Looked After Children and Young People often suffer from low self esteem and involvement in leisure or cultural activities can be a way of making our young people more confident individuals. Access to many activities can be difficult for Looked After Children and Young People because of factors such as cost, a feeling of being excluded and not having had any sort of experience of being part of these activities previously. As Corporate Parents we promote our leisure and cultural services and encourage our young people to participate by making the activities accessible. West Dunbartonshire Council's **Passport to Leisure** scheme provides all children with free access to swimming in council facilities and a reduction in fees for gyms. As Corporate Parents, we should ensure that our Looked After Children and Young People and their families are encouraged to access these services and take part in this scheme

Independent Organisations

Providers within the independent sector are an important part of the corporate family. Effective communication between the council, as the referring authority, and the provider is vital and we must maintain robust and regular reporting procedures.

To meet the educational needs of our Looked After Children, each independent provider should have a designated manager who will have responsibility for overseeing the progress of the children as recommended in ***Core Tasks for Designated Managers***.

Youth Justice Services

Not all Looked After Children and Young People are involved in offending, but a significant minority are involved in anti-social and/or offending behaviour. This can range from occasional to persistent and serious offending.

In dealing with offending behaviour the response from the Council and its partners should target both the offending and its impact, and deal with the underlying issues which make young people vulnerable to this form of behaviour.

Many of the supports and strategies which are relevant to the general Looked After populations are equally important to young people involved in offending.

At present there are positive links and communication between partners who specifically work with this group of young people.

We should continue and improve the high priority and support that this group of young people receive.

Children's Hearing System

Most of the Looked After Children in West Dunbartonshire have been subject to a supervision requirement by the Children's Panel.

Panel members have a responsibility, along with the Council, to ensure that the assessed needs of Looked After Children are fully met. This requires that the Panel Members have available to them an assessment and action plan which is up to date and is clear about what supports are necessary to achieve the required outcomes.

All those involved in supporting the Hearing System should work together to support young people and their families' participation at Hearings. Decisions and actions as a result of Hearings should be acted upon by all relevant partners.

The Council and its partners are actively involved in training and in keeping Panel members up to date with new developments.

Finance

While officers working in finance may not have direct contact with Looked After Children and Young People, they are part of processes and decisions which directly affect those children.

While there is an acknowledged need to ensure best value, the best interests of the child or young person must be at the forefront of any decisions made. It is crucial that thought is given before a service is purchased or redesigned on cost grounds and that the service is reviewed regularly to ensure the needs of the child are being met.

Human Resources

As the largest employer in the area, West Dunbartonshire Council has the potential to offer appropriate employment, placement and training opportunities to some Looked After Young People who are making the move into employment.

8. Next Steps

- The Council will launch its Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- Each department within the Council will develop an action plan to ensure all staff are aware of their responsibilities as Corporate Parents.
- Regular reports on how the Council is fulfilling its role as Corporate Parent will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Executive Group.
- An annual report on how the Council is fulfilling its role as Corporate Parent will be presented to full Council.
- Ongoing training and support will be given to all Council staff as required.
- An annual consultation will take place with our Looked After Children and Young People regarding their views on how well the Council fulfils its role as a Corporate Parent.
- The strategy will be reviewed every 3 years and updated as required.
- Consultation will take place with Community Planning Partners to develop the Strategy beyond the Council and to ensure consistency and links with the work of the Education and Life Long Learning Thematic Group.