

Cambridgeshire County Council **Guide to Corporate Parenting for Elected Members**



Welcome

Cambridgeshire's elected members have a crucial role to play in ensuring that the County is advocating, supporting and promoting positive outcomes for our most vulnerable children – those who are looked after by Cambridgeshire County Council and those who have left our care. We know that some of these children can be at risk of poorer outcomes than their peers and the Council, as their Corporate Parent, has a responsibility to ensure that we have the same aspirations and interest in their progress as any parent would have for their own child.

All elected members and council officers are Corporate Parents and this guide is designed to provide an overview of what this responsibility means in practice. It also suggests ways in which we can all make a difference to the lives of Children in Care and young people leaving care, whatever your level of involvement is with children's services.

I hope you find this guide useful whether it serves as a refresher or provides you with information you were not previously aware of. I also hope that you can use some of the suggestions to help us to continue to develop our services for those we look after, we are extremely fortunate in having a dedicated and enthusiastic workforce who are leading on a number of exciting initiatives that you may feel you could contribute to. We really do want to make a difference to children's lives and with your help, we will succeed.



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Introduction

We know from national data and academic research that children and young people who are looked after by a local authority can be at risk of poorer outcomes than their peers who are able to remain living at home with their families. It is not surprising that young people who are care experienced are more likely to leave school with fewer qualifications, may have a higher risk of offending and of not being engaged with education, employment or training.

When a child or young person cannot live with their birth family for whatever reason and they become looked after, Parental Responsibility for that child and young person also transfers to the local authority. This is referred to as corporate parenting.

Corporate parenting was first enshrined in legislation through the Children's Act (1989). Although it does not have a formal legal definition, it is commonly understood to mean that the elected members and officers of the local authority have a responsibility to take the same interest in the progress, attainments and wellbeing of children in care as any reasonable parent could be expected to have for their own children. Corporate parenting also extends to young people who have left the care of the local authority, as the local authority retains a level of responsibility for former children in care (Care Leavers) up to the age of twenty five.

The National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) reminds us that: 'corporate parenting should seek to ensure supportive relationships where young people feel cared for, not just looked after'. Being a good Corporate Parent involves championing the rights of Children in Care and Care Leavers, ensuring they have access to good services and support from the local authority and from other partner agencies working with them.



Why do Elected Members need to know about being a Corporate Parent?

When elected to represent their ward, district, or County, every elected member becomes a Corporate Parent as part of their role. Whilst much of the responsibility of the delivery of care to this cohort of children and young people is delegated to the children's workforce and other agencies such as health and education, officers and staff deliver services and support on *behalf of elected members*.

In 1998, Frank Dobson MP, then the responsible Secretary of State summarised the role of elected members in relation to corporate parenting as follows:

"The (looked after) child has a right to expect that members of the authority are looking out for him and will protect him from harm. Therefore, given the central importance of the local authority's role in caring for looked after children and supporting them to reach their potential, all councillors should take an informed interest in how the council supports this vulnerable group".

Whilst every elected member is by definition a Corporate Parent, not all elected members will have the same knowledge and involvement. The National Children's Bureau helpfully breaks the corporate parenting role down into three different levels of responsibility:

1. Universal responsibility – applicable to all councillors
2. Targeted responsibility – for example those councillors who sit on the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee of Fostering or Adoption Panels
3. Specialist responsibility – those councillors with a specific, relevant role for example the Lead Member for Children's Services, Chair of the Children and Young People Committee and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Subcommittee.

In April 2017, Cambridgeshire's Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee of the Children and Young People Committee (CYP) became active following a review of the long established Corporate Parenting Board. The new arrangements reflect the drive to strengthen arrangements for oversight and decision making in respect of corporate parenting activity with clear accountability to the CYP Committee, through adopting a scheme of delegated authority and a framework for decision making.



Cambridgeshire Virtual School

The purpose of Sub-Committee is to ensure that the Council is effectively discharging its role as Corporate Parent for all children and young people in its care and provides a key role in ensuring accountability. The transformation of the Sub-Committee has been led by the Chair, reinvigorating it into one which is proactive in challenging service delivery and advocating for Children in Care and Care Leavers, resulting in a more robust constitution with stronger governance principles.

The Sub-Committee has delegated authority to exercise all the Council's functions relating to the delivery, by or on behalf of the Council, of Corporate Parenting functions with the exception of policy decisions which remains with the CYP Committee.

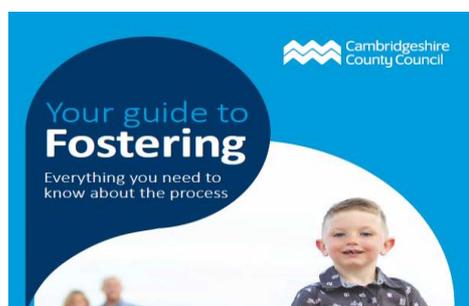
In Cambridgeshire delegated authority includes:

- Working with the Virtual School to raise standards of attainment and developing education, employment and training opportunities for children in care, former children in care and children leaving care.
- Ensuring mechanisms for consultation and participation are positively promoted and that the Council actively listens and responds to the views and experiences of children in care, former children in care and children leaving care.
- Receiving regular reports on the provisions of services for children in care and care leavers as required by legislation and for the purpose of monitoring and offering advice.
- Working with the Clinical Commissioning Group and health providers to ensure delivery of services to meet health needs including health assessments and plans, emotional health, sexual health, substance misuse and teenage pregnancy.

Now that the structure and governance arrangements are embedded, a refresh of Sub-Committee business took place in 2019. Sub-Committee resolved to adopt five key priorities which encapsulate a child's lived experience in order to strengthen the focus on specific outcomes for children, young people and former children in care (Care Leavers).

The Five Priorities are:

- Being and feeling safe
- Being healthy and leading a healthy lifestyle
- Achieving stability and permanence
- Preparing for adulthood
- Hearing the voices of children and young people



The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee works closely with Voices Matter (Cambridgeshire's Children in Care Council) and the Care Leavers Forum. These groups are made up of children and young people who are currently in care and those who have left the care of the local authority.

They help to advise officers and members in Cambridgeshire about their experiences of being cared for by us and what is important to them in terms of improving the services they receive.

In Cambridgeshire we have been very fortunate to have had the privilege of working with two care experienced young people who, as co-opted members of the Sub-Committee, have shared their knowledge and understanding to help develop and inform our priorities and discussions.

Councillor Bywater and Councillor Every, in their role as chair of the CYP Committee and Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee respectively, also meet regularly with Voices Matter to hear directly from children and young people. For further information about Voices Matter and the Care Leavers Forum please contact csc.participation@cambridgeshire.gov.uk.



The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee is an appropriate forum for elected members and relevant officers from the local authority and partner agencies to come together and offer challenge and support around services for Children in Care and Care Leavers. However, this is not the only way in which elected members can discharge their duties as Corporate Parents. Some suggestions as to how you could be involved are detailed below as well as answers to frequently asked questions.

What contact should I have with Children in Care and Care Leavers?

You can be an effective Corporate Parent without having to know individual Children in Care or Care Leavers personally. In fact, personal contact on an individual basis is not generally appropriate, unless Children in Care or Care Leavers choose to contact their local councillor as is their right as a Cambridgeshire resident.

However, some communication and contact is valuable in helping councillors to understand the importance of the corporate parenting role and in giving young people an opportunity to express their views and concerns directly to those with the authority to make decisions and shape policy.

Cambridgeshire's Promises to our Children in Care and the Care Leavers Charter (detailed at the end of this guide), outline what the service is committed to achieving for this population of children and young people. We ask that all members familiarise themselves with these commitments and if given the opportunity to meet with young people (for example at the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee or Voices Matter), that you show your commitment to their care by prioritising attendance.

You could also become involved by attending visits and events to further understand the issues that care experienced children and young people face and also to celebrate their achievements. In addition, you could attend recruitment and celebration events for Cambridgeshire's Foster Carers and join us by showing our appreciation for all that our carers do for the most vulnerable children in the County. If you are able to commit to any of these suggestions, it does really provide encouragement to our children, young people and foster families and demonstrates that we as a Council take our corporate parenting responsibilities seriously.



Is there any training available?

Member training seminars are held on a bi monthly basis and align with the key priority theme of the next Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee. You are very welcome to attend these seminars which are delivered by children's services staff and partner agencies. For further information about what's on, please contact:

CPSC.memberseminars@cambridgeshire.gov.uk.

What can all elected members do?

To be an effective Corporate Parent members can make sure that they:

- Be aware of the role and its implications for discharging the local authority's legal responsibilities for Children in Care and Care Leavers
- Develop knowledge and awareness of the services available for the children we look after, both across the council and from relevant partner agencies
- Act and advocate for Children in Care and Care leavers, ensuring their voices are heard, their needs are met and their achievements celebrated
- Prioritise the needs of Children in Care and Care Leavers in council decision making and budget setting
- Consider the potential impact of all council decisions on Children in Care, Foster Families and Care Leavers
- Ask questions of officers across the council, not just in Children's Services, about the quality of services provided to Children in Care and young people.

What can I do as a ward or district councillor?

- Be aware that there are probably Children in Care and Care Leavers living in your area of responsibility
- Be curious about and understand the issues that Children in Care and Care Leavers may face and the support that they need from their local authority
- Support and/or attend foster carer recruitment activity and celebration events that are taking place in your area
- Take an active interest in facilities for children and young people in your area and speak to staff about how they support the inclusion of Children in Care and Care Leavers
- Promote community understanding of Children in Care and Care Leavers
- Monitor and challenge council policy for its impact on Children in Care and Care Leavers
- Offer to help secure employment or training opportunities, work experience or placements for Children in Care and Care Leavers.



Our Promises to Cambridgeshire Children in Care

Cambridgeshire County Council is committed to supporting our Children in Care and Care Leavers and will always have high expectations of what they can do and achieve to reach their full potential.

Our Children in Care Council 'Voices Matter' and Care Leavers Forum have identified the following 10 Promises that Cambridgeshire County Council will strive to achieve.



The Care Leavers Charter

A Charter is a set of principles and promises. This Charter published on the Gov.Uk website, sets out promises that Care Leavers want central and local government to make. They help in decision making and do not replace laws but give guidance to show how laws are designed to be interpreted. The Charter was co-designed by care experienced young people and the DFE and has now been fully embedded in the Care Leavers Covenant.

The key principles in this Charter will remain constant through any changes in Legislation, Regulation and Guidance and it raises expectations, aspirations and understanding of what Care Leavers need and what government and local authorities should do to be Good Corporate Parents.

We Promise:

To respect and honour your identity

We will support you to:

- Discover and be who you are and honour your unique identity
- Develop your own personal beliefs and values
- Accept your culture and heritage

We will:

- Celebrate your identity as an individual, a member of identity groups and as a valued member of your community
- Value and support important relationships
- Help you manage changing relationships or come to terms with loss, trauma or other significant life events
- 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
- Hold a belief in your potential and a vision for your future
- Help you push aside limiting barriers and encourage and support you to pursue your goals
- 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 view
- 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
- Fully explain if we don't agree with you
- Provide easy access to complaint and appeals processes and promote and encourage access to independent advocacy whenever you need it

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
- Provide emotional advice as well as practical and financial help
- 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
- Not punish you if you change your mind about what you want to do
- Continue to care about you even when we are no longer caring for you
- Make it our responsibly to understand your needs or help you find a service that can
- Help you learn from your mistakes; we will not judge you and 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 to independent living only when you are ready
- Help you think about the choices available and to find accommodation that is right for you
- Do everything we can to ensure you are happy and feel safe when you move to independent living
- Recognise that at different times you may need to take a step back and start over again
- 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
- Work proactively with other agencies to help you sustain your home

To inform you

We will:

- Give you information that you need at every point of your journey, from care to adulthood
- Present this information in a way that you want
- Keep information up to date and accurate
- Ensure you know where to get current information once you are no longer in regular contact with leaving care services
- Make clear what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see
- 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 be a lifelong Champion

We will:

- Do our best to help you break down barriers encountered when dealing with other agencies
- 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
- Treat you with courtesy and humanity whatever your age when you return to us for advice or support
- Help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger
- Point you in a positive direction and journey alongside you at your pace
- Trust and respect you
- Not forget about you
- Remain your supporters in whatever way we can, even when our formal relationships with you has ended

