



Corporate Parenting Strategy

2020 - 2022

Foreword



Cllr Patricia Seaman

Cabinet Member for
Children and Young
People

I am proud to be the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board in my role as Lead Member for Children's Services. I believe that our looked after children are a key priority for Coventry City Council and all our partners. Children are at the heart of everything that we do. It is crucial that we hear their voices, both as part of individual care planning, but also to shape our services.

When I talk to our looked after children, I am always struck by how important stability is for them. This is particularly the case regarding where they live. For this reason, I am pleased that the new Corporate Parenting Strategy focuses our energy on making placement stability our top priority in the next few years.

I am also pleased that our new strategy has been informed by the voice of our children. Our looked after children are central to our practice and we must all make sure that we use their voice to inform their outcomes. If we listen to our children and what they think they want and need, it will make sure they will get the best that we can offer.



Foreword



John Gregg

Director of Children's
Services

In Coventry, I am proud that we all have children at the heart of our practise. This is particularly the case regarding our looked after children, where commitment from politicians, partners and colleagues across Children's Services is key to improving their outcomes. This is consolidated further in the One Coventry approach, which is fundamental to making sure that our services for looked after children are joined up and meets the needs of each individual child.

In our continued journey to be good, key strategies and plans inform our work with looked after children. I am pleased to see that these strategies form part of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. Voices of Care, our children in care council, has been involved in developing the Children's Services Strategic Plan for 2019-2022. A new Participation Strategy means that the views of looked after children are held very close to inform our work. Our children tell us that stability is key for them to achieve all they want in life. They want to live with carers where they can build close bonds and attachments. This will mean that they are more likely to achieve better outcomes. I am, therefore, excited that the new Corporate Parenting Strategy has a focus on how we can improve placement stability for all our children. The strategy brings together several other policies that impact upon this. Coventry's permanence policy and the new sufficiency strategy all contribute to helping children remain with carers for as long as they need. This is the golden thread that runs through our work in the city.

Together we can improve the lives of our looked after children so that they can live fulfilled and happy lives that will sustain them into adulthood with their own families.



Introduction

Coventry City Council, and all its partners, always put children at the very heart of practice. This is especially so regarding our looked after children where corporate parenting is a strong feature of all organisations. The Coventry Corporate Parenting Strategy is a key document that outlines the way in which all partners will work together to make sure our looked after children have the best positive outcomes. This is reflected in the One Coventry approach to delivering services to children across the city.

Coventry City Council has consolidated all its services for looked after children under one Strategic Lead. This means that there is one leader responsible for all the looked after children in Coventry. Relationships with partners are enhanced and professionals can build trusted working relationships. Operational leads for each part of the looked after service work closely to provide seamless services for children and the carers and professionals that work with them. This includes the members who are part of the Corporate Parenting Board. This collaborative approach to providing services for looked after child means that they receive good quality services that promote their individual outcomes.



Voice of the Child

The views of our children and young people are fundamental to the Coventry Corporate Parenting Strategy. The Children and Young People's Participation Strategy 2019-2021 details how their views are incorporated from services within Early Help, Children in Need, Child Protection and Looked After Children.

In Coventry, children and young people's views inform policy, practice, service design, development and evaluation. All children and young people have the opportunity to be involved:

- ▶ at an individual level through care planning
- ▶ at a service level by feeding back about their experiences of existing services and
- ▶ strategically by helping to commission new services

Children and young people have opportunities to get actively involved with:

- ▶ Voices of Care (our local Children in Care Council)
- ▶ Care Leavers Forum
- ▶ Youth Council
- ▶ Annual surveys

- ▶ Commissioning of Services
- ▶ Service User Feedback forms
- ▶ Development of publicity
- ▶ Training of their peers, Coventry City Council staff and foster carers
- ▶ Recruitment and selection of staff
- ▶ Events

The City Council's Corporate Parenting Board includes membership of young people with care experience.

The Participation Strategy monitors progress across Coventry Children's Services to ensure the voice of the child remains at the heart of all that we do.

Each year the Participation Team facilitates a survey across all looked after children over eight years of age and care leavers. Each year response rates are good. It tells us that children and young people feel cared for, safe where they live, their living arrangements are right for them and that they believe that they have a responsible adult who they can turn to if they wish.

Young people are encouraged to tell us where we could do better when meeting their needs. These comments are collated by the Participation Team and an action plan put together with all partners involved in providing services. These plans are presented to the Corporate Parenting Board which makes sure that organisations carry out improvements in their services: 'You said: We Did.' For example, a care leaver raised how difficult it can be moving from a care placement into his own property. In response to this, the Corporate Parenting Board spent some time focusing on improving care leavers move into their independence accommodation.



What is Corporate Parenting?

The term Corporate Parenting has been enshrined into legislation through the Children and Social Work Act 2017. It clarifies corporate parenting principles which local authorities and partners are required to adhere to.

When a child becomes 'looked after' the role of parenting is shared with parents and becomes the corporate responsibility of the council. This is known as corporate parenting and is a term used to describe how the city council and its partners collectively carry out their support and responsibilities to all children and young people who are in our care, by seeking the same positive outcomes that all parents would want for their own children.

Corporate parenting is a whole local authority enterprise. It places collective responsibility on the local authority to achieve good parenting for all children in care.

Specifically corporate parenting requires the Council and its partners:

1. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
2. to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
3. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
4. to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
5. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
6. for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
7. to prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.



As well as local authority responsibilities towards children and young people looked after, the Children Act 1989 placed a duty on partners including health, education and housing services to assist Children's Services to fulfil its functions under the Act – providing help, support and services in order to meet its corporate parenting responsibilities. This was reinforced further under the Children Act 2004, which requires the local authority to make arrangements to promote cooperation with relevant partners to improve the well-being of children.

Effective corporate parenting needs a commitment from elected members and all council employees as well as an authority wide approach. It also requires ownership and leadership at a senior level within the council. This is demonstrated by the work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

An example of where partners work together to improve outcomes for looked after children are care leavers is the NEET panel:

This year a multi-agency NEET panel has been launched. The purpose of the panel is to facilitate a multi-agency plan for young people who are struggling to access education, employment or training (NEET). The panel was launched in April and takes place on a bi-monthly basis. It is chaired by the Operational Lead for Through Care. It brings together staff from the Department for Work and Pensions– Job Centre Plus, the Job Shop, Propsects, the virtual school, the Coventry City Council apprenticeship team and adult education. The panel has been most successful when considering those young people that are nearly ready for work or education but need the right option with some extra support. Success ranges from young people now employed who had been long-term NEET to a young person that has become a volunteer at a charity for animal welfare. She completed work experience, obtained relevant qualifications and improve emotional well-being when she socialised with other in a work environment.

Bringing agencies together has meant that a full range of opportunities and support can be considered. Working with each young person means that agencies can be creative in coming up with ideas to help people back into positive activities.



Coventry Pledge

The Coventry Pledge is a list of promises made by the corporate parent to all of Coventry's looked after children and care leavers. The list of promises was created by a diverse range of young people, in conjunction with their carers and other adults who work with them, and ratified by elected members. It is a fundamental part of the city's commitment to looked after children across the city and is overseen by the Corporate Parenting Board. The Pledge was specifically reviewed by the Board in 2017-2018 to make sure that the promises made were delivered. Outcomes for children improved with some examples as follows:

- ▶ **Fit for life** - the annual survey has demonstrated that children feel safe where they live. Independence work has been reviewed and reinvigorated by young people to make sure that it helps prepare them for adulthood.
- ▶ **Your views count** - children are involved in decisions in their life through looked after reviews and all looked after children can have an independent advocate if they want one. Voices of Care have designed posters for councillors, social workers and carers about how they want to be treated by the adults in their lives.

- ▶ **Safe and Sound** - in the annual survey, children report that they feel safe where they live and are happy in their placement. Any issues identified by children are responded to promptly to make sure they are and feel safe.
- ▶ **Investing in your future** - a new looked after savings policy has been developed and implemented. Young people and care leavers are offered a vast array of apprenticeships in the Council and with partners.
- ▶ **You can do it** - the annual looked after celebration event and the care leavers conference celebrates all aspects of our children's achievement. The Corporate Parenting Board has been able to make sure that all children are able to participate in a vast array of hobbies and interests.
- ▶ **Coventry cares about you** - a new life story practice guide has been produced and rolled out so that all staff have clear guidance on how to complete this important work with children and young people. An extensive mentor scheme exists in the City Council.

Each year looked after children and care leavers, are asked their views about how well the promises within the Pledge are being met. Following analysis of this survey an action

plan is developed which identifies areas for development. Individual issues are followed up for each young person where appropriate and themes are identified. This means that the voices of young people are listened to and their views inform service development.

The Coventry Pledge forms the basis of the looked after celebration event. This is an annual event which makes sure the achievements of looked after children are celebrated. This is very much dependent upon the needs of each individual child and is judged with this in mind. This is a high-profile event across the city and is attended by members of the Corporate Parenting Board, senior leaders, partners, social workers, carers and other people who are important to each child.

www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/3502/coventry_pledge_poster

www.coventry.gov.uk/info/36/childrens_health_and_wellbeing/777/coventry_pledge/2

Placement Stability

Placement stability is key for producing good outcomes for children and young people who are looked after. Evidence and research demonstrate that children need to build trusted and sustained relationships with carers, social workers, teachers and health professionals. If children build enduring relationships with trusted adults who offer unconditional support, children feel valued. This allows children to achieve to the best of their ability. This is reinforced by the Children's Commissioner who measures the stability of children's relationships with the professionals involved in their lives, on a regular basis. Coventry's Corporate Parenting Strategy places placement stability as the key focus for improving the outcomes for our children. It is the 'golden thread' that runs through our work. Links with family members are promoted to make sure that young people are supported into their adulthood. This means that young people have a better understanding of their history and this, in turn, promotes stability in their living arrangements. This is facilitated through the Family Group Conference Service where additional investment means that all young people get access to this service where appropriate.

Coventry has a number of aspects that demonstrate its commitment to improving placement stability, and in turn, outcomes for children.

- ▶ **Permanence strategy:** Coventry City Council has a comprehensive Permanence Strategy. This is the bedrock for social work practise and creates a foundation to improve relationship-based practice. This means that all workers across the whole of Children's Services understand the need for children to have permanency at the earliest opportunity. This is monitored through the Permanence Panel and children are matched to permanent carers at the earliest opportunity.

https://coventrychildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_perm_tracking.html?zoom_highlight=Permanency+Strategy

- ▶ **Sufficiency:** Placement stability is informed by a good understanding of the placement needs of the Coventry looked after population. Coventry has a sufficiency strategy that is regularly refreshed. This means there is an understanding of the placement requirements of our children. Children benefit from this understanding by having the best possible range of placements available to enhance matching. This means children will live with matched carers at the earliest opportunity.



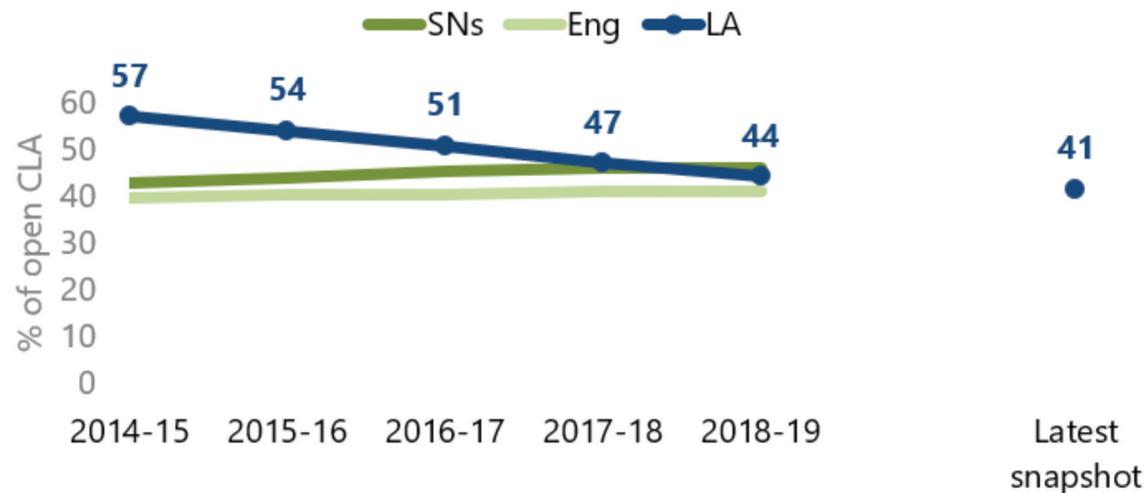
▶ **Matching:** Placements have the best chance of meeting children’s needs into the future if they are planned, have an element of choice and there are good introductions. It is crucial that children are consulted at the earliest opportunity and have a voice that is respected in the matching process as far as possible. To improve matching of children to the best possible carer, a new Placement Information Record has been designed and implemented throughout Children’s Services. This is a strength based, outcome focused referral which means that staff who search for placements fully understand the needs for each individual child. Discussion with allocated social workers and potential carers means that the best possible match can be made, and the placement is likely to be successful.

▶ **Local provision:** Children generally do better when placed close to their families, communities and the professionals that offer them support. When children are placed locally relationships between the authority and the carer can be closer. Support can be provided by local partners through a ‘team around the child’ approach.

Coventry City Council is currently intensively recruiting foster carers and has opened three new children’s homes. This will mean that children are more likely to be placed in or close to Coventry. During the last two years there has been an increase of 10 percentage points of children who live in Coventry. Currently 55.9% of our children live in Coventry with another 18.7% living in neighbouring authorities.



CLA placements out of City



Corporate Parenting Board

The Coventry City Council Corporate Parenting Board is constituted as a Cabinet Advisory Panel for looked after children. This Board is part of the quality assurance process to make sure that Coventry City Council is delivering on the promises made in the Pledge.

The Board is made up of elected members and co-opted people including young people, officers of the City Council and colleagues from

partner agencies. This includes foster carer representatives.

The Board has a schedule of meetings across the year with a focus on various aspects of looked after children's lives.

The Board takes its role as a corporate parent very seriously and this is a keystone in making sure outcomes for looked after children are the

best they can be. The Corporate Parenting Board champions outcomes for looked after children and these are documented in an annual report published through the Cabinet Member Briefing for Children and Young People.

<https://internaldemocraticservices.coventry.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=583&Year=0>



Partners

Coventry City Council works closely with partners to make sure that all aspects of their work promote stability for our children. The impact of this can be seen in areas such as the number of young people who go on to university. Stability across all aspects of children's life is crucial. This includes their education. It is important that children remain in the same school wherever possible. This means that children can build relationships with teachers and education staff that will help them to achieve the best possible education outcomes. Schooling for all our looked after children is overseen by the Virtual Head who reviews stability in school as part of each child's education plan. Education partners are part of and accountable to the Corporate Parenting Board. An annual report is presented to the Board which monitors qualifications attained, attendance, exclusions and the additionality that education brings to our children.

NHS Coventry and Rugby Clinical Commissioning Group and Local Authority Public Health work in partnership with Coventry City Council to promote the health needs of looked after children across the health and social care economy. Both the Designated Doctor and Designated Nurse for looked after children attend Corporate Parenting Board meetings. The agenda for Corporate Parenting Board is themed on a key health priority for looked after children at least once per year. The health priorities are aligned to the looked after children health action plan as agreed as part of the looked after children annual report. The annual report is presented to Corporate Parenting Board. The action plan also sets the priorities of the Health of Looked after Children (HeLAC) meeting and task and finish groups ensure that the City Council, Health Commissioners and health providers are moving towards shared goals in improving the health outcomes of looked after children.

For a summary of the looked after children action plan and key health priorities [click here](#)



A Coventry CAMHS Looked After Children service is established and provides mental health and emotional wellbeing support for children and young people looked after. It is jointly commissioned by the City Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group and delivered by Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust and Coventry and Warwickshire Mind. The service has recently been expanded to support care leavers up to the age of 21. As well as providing support to individuals and groups of young people, consultations are offered to social workers and residential staff to enable the professionals to support the emotional wellbeing of the looked after children they care for. Nurturing training is also offered to foster carers to support placement stability and promote attachment with looked after children with complex needs and who have faced significant trauma in their lives, and now have the chance to form stable and secure relationships with their carers. Support is also offered to social workers to enable them to support looked after children with therapeutic life story work.

The authority has close relationships with police colleagues. This brings a focus to placement stability by concentrating on reducing the criminalisation of our looked after children, making sure that children who go missing get a high priority police response. Each children's home in the city have close working relationships with PCSOs with a dedicated named officer linked to each home. This supports restorative practice in the homes and means that children can build trusting relationships with police officers.



Care Leavers

Good parents continue to support children as they become adults. Coventry has very high aspirations for its care leavers. This is demonstrated in the local offer for care leavers.

This is a requirement under the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The local offer is crucial for making sure that care leavers experience stability into adult life.

The local offer has been co-produced with partners and has been led by the young people themselves and what they want and believe will help them as adults. Five key initiatives underpinning the offer include:

- ▶ Coventry City Council pays apprentices the national living wage
- ▶ Care leavers get free leisure passes which include gym membership. In addition to this each care leaver can take a friend so that they feel more motivated to attend
- ▶ Council tax exemptions are paid for all care leavers regardless of whether they live in Coventry city or not
- ▶ Coventry does not make care leavers intentionally homeless as long as they are working with the City Council to resolve their housing situation

- ▶ Increases in the number of young people going on to access higher education at university

These aspects of good practice have been endorsed and highlighted by the Department for Education, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the National Benchmarking Forum.

<https://cdn.catch-22.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Local-Offer-Thematic-Report.pdf>

www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/12-by-24

The service also works closely with local businesses to negotiate what they can offer to care leavers. Current examples of this include water bill exemptions for care leavers, employability options such as preparation for interviews and free pizzas from a local provider. The care leavers awards are sponsored by businesses who actively get involved on the evening and through the year. The Chamber of Commerce in Coventry actively commits to improving outcomes for care leavers. It is

the major sponsor of the Care Leaver awards and links the service into specific businesses when demands arise. This includes presents for looked after children at Christmas, food for trips and it facilitates work experience to link in with aspirations of individual young people. It has committed to promoting businesses being 'fostering friendly' employers.

www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/29100/through_care_local_offer



Measures of success

Coventry is committed to improving outcomes for looked after children across the city. There are several measures that will be considered to evaluate how we are doing:

- ▶ Young people will say they are loved and supported in their placements. This will be reflected in casework records and what our children and young people tell us
 - ▶ The annual survey will demonstrate that children and young people are happy with the services that they are offered
 - ▶ Children and young people will move less often. This will be reflected in the short and long-term stability performance measures. Coventry will have good performance against statistical neighbours, West Midlands and England averages
 - ▶ Individual audits of children will show improved outcomes for children through being in care
 - ▶ Foster carers will feel better supported to continue to care for children even through difficult times
- ▶ Children will only live in a children's home if they have an assessed need to do so. Children's Services aspires for all children to live in good or better children's homes as judged by Ofsted. However, this will always be balanced against a child's needs, wishes and a requirement only to move children when necessary
 - ▶ Young people will be prepared for independence and move on appropriately
 - ▶ Less children will have to move on an immediate basis
 - ▶ Children's outcomes at school and in education will improve
 - ▶ Children and young people will have improved health outcomes



