



# Children's Services Corporate Parenting Strategy

**April 2011 – April 2014**

**April 2013 annual update report.**

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## **Foreword**

### **Corporate Parenting Strategy Aims**

Barking and Dagenham Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy for Looked After Children demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that the life chances of every child and young person in our care are improved in line with their peers through the provision of effective support that addresses disadvantage and enables them to reach their full potential.

The overall aim of this strategy is to reinforce the corporate responsibility of the whole council, and our partner agencies, through commitment to a range of initiatives which reflect national and local policies and best practice.

### **Corporate Parenting**

Corporate Parenting is the term used to refer to the collective responsibility of the Council to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are 'looked after', that is, those who are in the public care.

Effective corporate parenting in Barking and Dagenham, demands commitment from all council employees and elected members and an authority wide approach.

This responsibility for Local Authorities was first laid out in the Children Act 1989 and recent Government guidance for Councillors "*If this were my child*" reiterated the leading role of Councillors in ensuring that their Council acts as an effective corporate parent for every child in care, actively supporting standards of care and seeking high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their child.

We are fortunate that we have partners, in other agencies, across the Borough who share our commitment to Corporate Parenting and take their role, through the Children's Trust extremely seriously, and we receive regular reports to the Board.

We are passionate that this must be a priority for everyone, ensuring the best possible outcomes for children for whom we act as parents

Helen Jenner  
Corporate Director for Children's Services

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### Corporate Parenting

The responsibility of local authorities in improving outcomes and actively promoting the life chances of children they look after has become known as 'corporate parenting' in recognition that the task must be shared by the whole local authority and partner agencies. The role of the corporate parent is to act as the best possible parent for each child they look after and to advocate on his/her behalf to secure the best possible outcomes.

(Children Act 1989, Guidance & Regulations Vol. 2, Care Planning , Placement and Review, DfES 2010)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Most children and young people live successful and happy lives within their families and have little need for external support other than that provided universally by services such as health or education. However, for some, targeted and specialised support is required to help address particular problems and maintain the family as a unit. Such support will vary and may come from Schools, Integrated Family Services or Health Services but, whatever form it takes, services will always be based on a full assessment of child or young person's needs within the family, will be planned and coordinated, and delivered to agreed outcomes to ensure their best interests are met.

For a small number of young people, such interventions are insufficient to ensure their safety and well-being. In these cases, either with the agreement of the parent/s or through care proceedings, the Council needs to assume responsibility for these children. Children in this situation come into care and the Authority takes on the role of Corporate Parent. Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe the duties of the Local Authority and its partners to children and young people in care. Its central principle is that the Local Authority and its partners should parent children in care the same way any parent parents their own children.

In essence it means:

1. Accepting responsibility for all children in the Council's care
2. Making their needs a priority
3. Seeking the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own child.

The Children Act 1989 defines a child as being aged 0 - 18 years, but the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 extends a Local Authority's responsibilities to care leavers up to the age of 21, or 25 if they are in full-time education.

When a Local Authority looks after a child or young person, it has a legal responsibility to share the duties and responsibilities of the child's parent. Where a child or young person is subject to a Care Order, this responsibility is conferred upon the Local Authority by a Court. Although it is best practice not to make any decision in relation to the child or young person in isolation from considering the wishes and feelings of the parent, the Local Authority does have the power to do so. These powers include giving consent for children or young people to undergo medical interventions.

Unlike children or young people subject to Care Orders, children and young people in care under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 are looked after

under a partnership arrangement with the parent. The Local Authority does not share parental responsibility with the parent and cannot consent to any planned medical treatment except in exceptional circumstances. Parents should be consulted about all aspects of a child's care, but there are numerous occasions when the Local Authority acts in the best interests of a child, in the absence of a parent. An arrangement under Section 20 may be discharged at any time by a parent and the child or young person must be returned home.

Irrespective of how a child or young person comes into our care, it is always more beneficial to the child or young person that the Local Authority works in partnership with the parent whenever it is possible.

In order to fulfill our role as a responsible Corporate Parent, this Strategy sets out Barking & Dagenham's commitment and determination to deliver improved outcomes for our children and young people in care. We want their childhoods to be safe, secure, healthy, productive and enjoyable as well as providing stable foundations for the rest of their lives.

We are determined:

- to give every child and young person in care a stable, high quality placement
- to get them a place in a good school and help them get the most out of it
- to support them in continued training, employment or education past the age of 16
- to secure support for all aspects of their lives outside school
- to better support them to make a positive transition into adult life
- to focus their needs through strong accountability.

The Strategy aims to focus the role of the Corporate Parent by outlining key activities that support the Corporate Parenting role.

The 2011 – 14 strategy will also be reviewed on an annual basis by the Members Corporate Parenting Group and progress will be reported in the form of an annual update report, as enclosed herein.

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## 2 THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

As of March 2012 there were 67,050 children in care in England and it is well documented that they underachieve educationally and are highly represented in social exclusion factors such as teenage pregnancy, unemployment, youth offending, poor mental health, drug and alcohol abuse and homelessness.

Evidence suggests that children who come into care require support, stability and opportunities so that they can overcome these barriers and maximise their life chances.

The Government also acknowledges that nationally there is a gap between outcomes for children in care and those of all children.

In 2008, for example:

- Only 66% of young people left care with 1 or more GCSE compared with 99% in the non care population
- Only 14% left care with 5 A\*-C grades compared to 65% of all young people
- Their health is poorer than that of other children. 45% of children and young people in care were assessed as having a mental health disorder compared to around 10% of all children
- 9% of children in care aged 10 and over have been cautioned or convicted of an offence, compared to 4.3% of all children
- 30% of care leavers aged 19 were not in education, employment or training compared to 8.1% of all 19 year olds.

To address this, the government launched a Green Paper, Care Matters, which was followed by a White Paper, Care Matters: Time for Change.

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### 3. THE LOCAL CONTEX

Update for March 2013

There were 420 children and young people in the care of Barking and Dagenham (78 per 10,000 population under 18), compared to 427 (79 per 10,000 population under 18) in March 2012.

- 38% with the agreement of parents (Section 20) compared to 39% last year.
- 61% through Court Orders (Interim, Full Care Orders, Placement Orders) compared to 60% last year.
- 1% remanded into LA Care.
- 82% children in care are placed with foster or adoptive families compared to 81% last year.
- 5% are placed within residential settings compared to 7% last year.

The majority of the rest of the children in care are placed in semi-independent accommodation with a few placed with their birth families as part of a reunification process.

Where children and young people are unable to return to their birth family, adoption and special guardianship orders are considered, as these offer a secure, permanent and stable alternative. In 2012/2013, 15% of children left care through adoption or special guardianship compared to 17% in 2011/12, and 12% in 2010/11.

Over the past few years, Barking & Dagenham Children's Services have invested significant effort into raising the aspirations of both children and young people in care and their allocated workers.

The results of our efforts can be seen in the following outcomes for children in care:

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>04/05</b>	<b>05/06</b>	<b>06/07</b>	<b>07/08</b>	<b>08/09</b>	<b>09/10</b>	<b>10/11</b>	<b>11/12</b>	<b>12/13</b>
Health of children in care for a year or more	90.8%	97.3%	98.1%	98.6%	93.0%	90.1%	91.0%	94.2%	71.2%
Looked After Children achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs (or equivalent) at Key Stage 4 (including English and Maths)	n/a	n/a	n/a	10.0%	9.4%	12.5%	21.4%	20.0%	7.4%
The Employment, Education & Training of Care Leavers (NI48)	55.0%	38.8%	51.0%	58.3%	49.2%	48.6%	49.0%	40.4%	56.4%

The number of young people who were previously in care and are now studying at university as of November 2012 is 22, however despite this inspirational improvement there is still work to be done to eliminate the gap between the achievements of children in care in comparison to their peers, who still achieve much better educational outcomes. It is the responsibility of all professionals working with children and young people in care to make sure that they are given the highest priority, and to give them the help and support that they need to maximise their life chances.

Although the statutory responsibilities for children in care are primarily discharged by Children's Services and the Complex Needs and Social Care division, Corporate Parenting is the responsibility of all Council departments and partner agencies.



The success of Corporate Parenting depends on ownership and leadership at a senior level, including elected members who have a specific role to play in ensuring that the outcomes and life chances of looked after children and young people are maximised.

### **THE ROLE OF CORPORATE PARENTS IN BARKING AND DAGENHAM:**

As Corporate Parents, we need to continually ask:

- If this were my child, would it be good enough for them?
- If I were that child, would it be good enough for me?
- How could I make it ever better?
- How will I know that they have done well and are happy and successful?

Corporate Parenting is a borough-wide issue which involves not only Senior Managers and elected members, but also all staff in agencies who have contact with or are working together with children and young people. Staff in all agencies have a duty to ensure that they play their part as effective Corporate Parents. We must demand the highest standards for all our children in care, ensuring that systems and services are in place which reflects their needs, abilities, cultural heritage and life experiences.

### **3 GOVERNANCE & DELIVERY OF SPECIALIST SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN CARE**

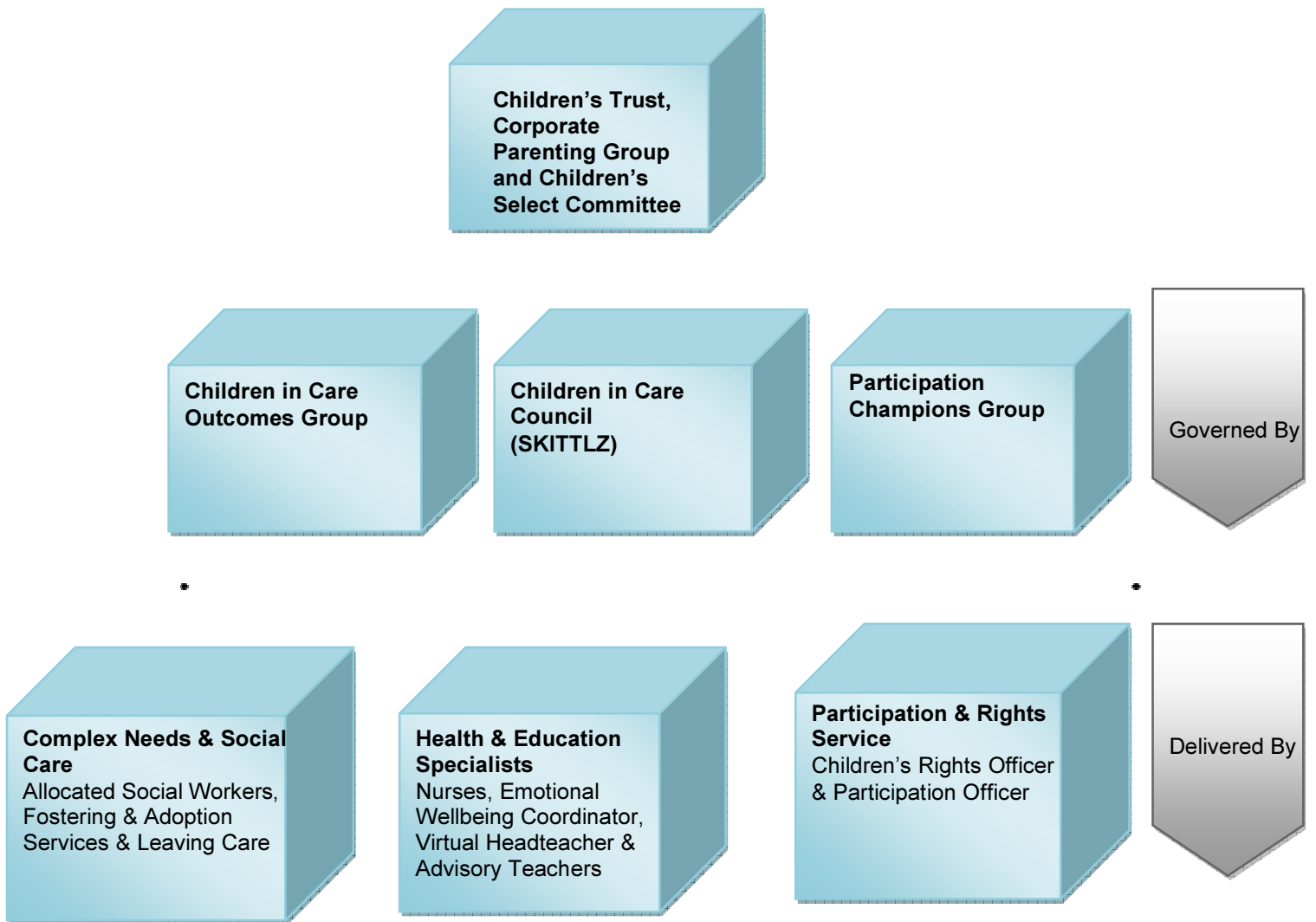
Reports to the Children's Trust, the Children's Select Committee and the Local Safeguarding Children Board from Corporate Parents ensure that outcomes for Looked After Children are closely monitored.

The Children In Care (CIC) Outcomes Group acts as a strategic hub in collating and analysing performance information across developmental domains for children in care. Representation on the CIC Outcomes Group is from Social Care, Health and Education and it is chaired by the Director of Children's Services.

The Skittlz Group is Barking and Dagenham's Child in Care Council. The group comprises representatives from each age group who have a regular dialogue with Senior Managers to ensure that the views of children and young people are being heard. The group actively seeks to gather and promote the views of other children and young people in the care of Barking and Dagenham Children's Services.

The Participation & Champions group is a new sub group to the Members Corporate Parenting Group. This group consists of looked after young people via Skittlz (CiC Council) and a group of social workers including Independent Reviewing Officers and the Divisional Director for Complex Needs and Social Care. This group initially came together to enable young people to share directly their insights with a group of social workers. Further discussion at this initial workshop discussed whether there would be value in a regular meeting of Skittlz representatives and operation staff so that young people's experiences could be shared and changes to practice and procedure could be debated and simply implemented where possible. The group has begun to meet on a bi monthly basis and initial tasks include agreeing membership and terms of reference. The group also has the potential to be 'tasked' by the MCPG to explore specific themes as a group of both young people and professionals and report findings / make recommendations back to the MCPG itself.

Figure: Governance and Delivery of Specialist Services for Children in Care



### Key Achievements 2012/13

- Continued improvement in the unauthorised absence from school performance over the past 3 years to the extent that Barking and Dagenham is ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> nationally.
- Children Looked After who have been excluded from school (fixed term) is now below the national average (11.7% nationally) and Barking and Dagenham ranked 8<sup>th</sup> nationally.
- Over 85% of young people aged 16 plus have up to date pathway plans that have been reviewed in the past 6 months, an improvement of over 35% when compared with the performance 2 years ago.
- Reduction in the number of young people cared for in residential institutions from 33 at the beginning of the year to 23 at the end March 2013.
- Increase in the number of young people cared for by local foster carers; 251 at March 2012 to 266 in March 2013.
- 81% of children in care are currently placed in foster care or placed for adoption - a 2% increase on the previous year.
- Specialist fostering scheme PITSTOP has expanded from 5 to 9 placements in the past year.
- Placement stability for Children Looked After has been maintained has improved – both long term and short term
- The Emotional and behavioural health of looked after children has improved with the average score falling from 18.4 in 11/12 to 13.5 in 12/13. This is in line with national averages.
- The percentage of Care Leavers in suitable Accommodation continues to improve, rising from 87% in 11/12 to 92% in 12/13.
- Young people in care council (Skittlz) meets bi monthly with Divisional Director and a group of social workers across the directorate to discuss and debate concerns and to take action improve services offered to children in care. This has for example, resulted in young people piloting the use of digital media to ensure meaningful contributions to their reviews. The work of this group will be regularly reported to the Members Corporate Parenting Group.
- A group of young people in care have begun to contribute to the Complex Needs and Social care division's review and re-shaping of a future social work service.
- Skittlz continue to attend and contribute to Member's Corporate Parenting Group, supported by the Rights and Participation Team.
- The Participation Champions group has been established as a sub group of the MCPG. This is a group consisting of front line social workers and Skittlz representatives, to enable young people to express their views to social workers and to make simple adjustments to practice where possible.
- 'Young People's Take Over Day' is undertaken every November with young people who are / have been looked after shadow key staff from Children's Services. The directorate remains committed to acting upon the feedback received by young people as a consequence of their time with managers.

**Children In Care Dataset - Children's Complex Needs and Social Care**

Description of Indicator	End of Year 2011/12 Performance		End of Year 2012/13 Performance	
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%
Number of Children in Care	427	n/a	420	n/a
Children in Care Rate per 10,000	86	n/a	78	n/a
Children who have had 3 or more placements	54/427	12.6%	39/240	9.3%
Children aged under 16 who have been in care for at least 2.5 years and in the same placement for 2 years	64/97	66.0%	86/115	74.8%
Children in care reviews completed within timescales	349/406	86.0%	320/390	82.1%
Children in Care participating in their review	323/327	98.8%	308/314	98.1%
Emotional and behavioural health of looked after children	179/3300	18.4	185/2496	13.5
Placed for Adoption Timing	14/22	63.6%	14/21	66.7%
Children In Care with up to date 3 monthly visits	190/212	89.6%	188/228	82.5%
Children In Care with up to date 6 weekly visits	162/218	74.3%	138/187	73.8%
Children In Care with an up to date PEP	190/255	74.5%	190/254	74.8%
All Children In Care with up to date health checks	357/427	83.6%	265/420	63.1%
Children in Care for a year or more up to date health checks	261/277	94.2%	195/274	71.2%
Care Leavers with an up to date Pathway Plan	203/226	89.8%	203/230	88.3%
Care leavers age 19 in employment, education or training	19/47	40.4%	22/39	56.4%
Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation	41/47	87.2%	36/39	92.3%