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**East Dunbartonshire Council**

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# **Corporate Parenting Policy**

## 1.0 **Background / Context**

- 1.1 *“You may feel that “corporate responsibility” and “corporate parenting” are rather obscure concepts, or, at least, concepts that bear little relation to activities in the real world. However, the fact is that children’s lives are directly and profoundly affected by the quality of corporate parenting offered to them! This is not to replace or replicate the selfless character of parental love but it does imply a warmth and personal concern which goes beyond the traditional expectations of institutions.”*  
(Sir William Utting, 1991)
- 1.2 Corporate parenting is a significant responsibility placed on local authorities and their planning partners to provide critical care and support to children, in need of protection. These children are amongst the most vulnerable in our communities and require statutory interventions to safeguard their welfare. For some children this results in alternative care arrangements away from home and for others the delivery of community based comprehensive support packages, aimed at minimising future risk of harm. Their lives are often characterised by disruption, disadvantage, neglect and poor levels of parental care. They frequently live in households with high levels of poverty, unemployment, parental substance misuse and the impact of mental health issues on parenting. Parents can have limited ability to provide adequate levels of emotional and physical support, which leaves children more vulnerable, lacking in confidence and likely to underachieve on a number of fronts. They often do not enjoy the childhoods experienced by peers such as regular nutritious meals, adequate clothing and leisure activities.
- 1.3 The outcomes for looked after and accommodated children and young people are much poorer than for their peers. Their educational attainment is often poor; they are more likely to be excluded from school; they are often in poor health; many have mental health difficulties and some have difficulty controlling their behaviour. The outcomes for children subject to statutory orders whilst living at home are worse than for those of accommodated children. The last ten years has seen a significant change in demographics, in respect of children. Despite a fall in the child population, there has been a disproportionate national increase in the proportion of children and young people who are vulnerable.
- 1.4 Corporate parenting emphasises the collective responsibility for local authorities and their community planning partners to achieve good parenting for all children in their care. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 places a duty on councils to make sure that once a child is looked after, all elected members and officers of the council as their corporate parents, are concerned about that child as if s/he was their own. This concern encompasses the child’s education, their health and welfare, where they live, what they do in their leisure time and holidays, how they celebrate their culture and how they receive praise and encouragement for their achievements. These responsibilities are underpinned by statute and national policy mandates highlight the importance of meeting these duties:
- Safeguarding the child’s welfare is of paramount concern.
  - Promoting regular contact between the child and parent and other relevant people.
  - Taking into account the views of the child, parent and others.

- Consideration of the child’s religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background.
- Preparing the child for when he/she is no longer looked after.

1.5 Two major national policy documents, “We Can and Must Do Better” and “These are our Bairns” highlight the differences in outcomes between Looked After Children and their peers and outline the key responsibilities of community planning partners. “These are our Bairns” states that being a good corporate parent means we should:-

- Accept responsibility for the council’s looked after children and young people;
- Make their needs a priority; and
- Seek for them, the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.

1.6 There is recognition by the Scottish Government that the current situation cannot continue and remedies must be found. The challenges associated with the implementation of a successful Corporate Parenting Policy are significant and require all services to play a critical role in taking this important agenda forward. The Regulations and Guidance on Services for Young People Ceasing to be Looked After by Local Authorities gives a simple, but very clear indication of what this means:

**“Corporate Parenting: that the local authority should look after these children as other parents would look after their own children. The role of corporate parent is not restricted to the social work department of the local authority but applies to all departments and agencies , who should recognise their own responsibility to promote the welfare of looked after (children and) young people and ensure that their needs are adequately addressed by each department.”**

1.7 East Dunbartonshire Council and its planning partners recognise the need to effectively support our most vulnerable children and young people and will:

- Provide care, a home and access to education and other public services to which all children are entitled, according to their needs
- Provide a mixture of care and firmness to support the child’s development, and be tolerant, dependable and caring in our approach
- Protect and educate the child to deal with lives risks by encouraging constructive and appropriate friendships and discouraging destructive and harmful relationships
- Celebrate the child’s achievements, supporting them when they are unhappy
- Ensure that the child/young person receives the routine and specialist medical and dental treatment they require
- Protect and educate the child/young person with regard to their physical, psychological, social and health needs
- Recognise and respect their growth to independence, being tolerant and supportive of their mistakes
- Provide consistent support, advice and practical help when needed
- Advocate their cause and problem solve on their behalf when necessary
- Be ambitious for them and encourage and support them to reach their full potential
- Celebrate birthdays and other key occasions relevant to the Childs culture during periods of accommodation.

- Encourage and enable appropriate contact with family members/parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts etc.
- Promote their involvement in the local community
- Be proactive when difficulties arise in their lives
- Support children to achieve similar educational attainment to that of their peers and secure positive post 16 destinations

## **2.0 How can we change this situation?**

- 2.1 Corporate parenting must address these major life disadvantages. The Delivering for Children and Young People Partnership (DCYPP) has a collective responsibility to achieve the standard of parenting for looked after and accommodated children, that individually each member and officer would want for his or her own child. To discharge this responsibility effectively means that looked after and accommodated children must be the primary focus for the resources and accountability of the council and its community planning partners.
- 2.2 The principles of good parenting include:
- Providing a safe and nurturing environment
  - Responding to children and young people's individual developmental and health needs
  - Listening to children and young people
  - Striving for continuity and stability
  - Having high expectations
  - Valuing and promoting education
  - Seeking early intervention and appropriate support when needed
  - Promoting inclusion
  - Championing children's rights and entitlements
- 2.3 If we are to effectively discharge our duty as corporate parents, we must ensure that these principles inform the work of all council services and partner agencies.

## **3.0 What this means...**

### **The establishment of a Champions Board**

To implement this policy, DCYPP will establish a Champions' Board of elected members and senior officers from across the Community Planning Partnership. The Champions' Board will assume responsibility for ensuring adherence to the Corporate Parenting Policy. The Board will produce an annual report for DCYPP for approval by relevant Committees. Consideration will also be given to Chief Officers undertaking a "championing" role in relation to individual children and young people.

- 3.1 For elected members:
- 3.1.1 A number of recent enquiries have examined the role of Councillors in safeguarding vulnerable children and young people, not least the Laming enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié. The serious breakdown in communications and failure of agencies to work together led to tragic consequences. As part of the evidence given to Lord Laming, elected members said that they were unaware of the scale of the problem faced by their services. The Laming Inquiry harshly criticised the defence of "no-one ever told me" and stressed the importance of distinct lines of accountability. Lord Laming insists that "Elected councillors and senior officers must ensure that they are kept fully informed about the delivery of services... and must not accept at face value what they are told".

3.1.2 The role of corporate parent is, therefore, one of the most important roles which councillors take on and includes setting strategic objectives for children's services; being aware of the volume and trends of needs and allocating resources accordingly; monitoring how health care, education and life chances are improving for looked after children; and ensuring that services are equally accessible to all looked after children, regardless of their ethnic origin, religion or culture. This means considering the needs of looked after children when making decisions; listening to their views and experiences; and being their champion by putting them first.

**Outcomes:**

- Children in Council care are the primary focus for resources and accountability of the Council which has accepted a parenting responsibility for them.
- Children who have spent significant time being looked after, when they leave care are given the kind of support that responsible parents give their children.
- Children in Council care are provided with a fully rounded set of support and care services, in partnership with Health, Housing, Social Work and Education.
- Elected members know the overall needs of children in their community; what services have been provided; how much is being spent ; how they can judge the quality and effectiveness of care and whether the Council achieves good care for its children.

3.2 For Council Services:

3.2.1 **Social Work:** Together with children at risk of being harmed, children who are looked after are the highest priority for social work services. Resources are targeted to this group and provide:

- High quality assessments – to ensure that the individual needs of children are identified and understood.
- Individualised support – to meet assessed need, for example, therapeutic intervention; mentoring; relationship and self-esteem building; advocacy; and challenging offending behaviour.
- Safe, nurturing foster and residential placements matched to assessed needs.
- Financial and practical support to looked after young people who are moving on to independence – in recognition of the extreme vulnerability of many looked after young people and to mirror the ongoing support that other young people continue to receive from their families into adulthood.

**Outcome :** The needs of looked after children / looked after and accommodated children are assessed, identified and met through the delivery of co-ordinated supports and services:

- 1 A comprehensive assessment of need (GIRFEC) is completed.
- 2 A detailed care plan that outlines the services to be provided and roles / remit of staff is available.
- 3 A range of services, to meet identified need, are in place.
- 4 There is an identified budget for the purchase of commissioned services.
- 5 Compliance with a commissioning strategy is evidenced.
- 6 Care needs are reviewed within an agreed timescale.
- 7 Social Work Services identify and co-ordinate appropriate support to meet need.
- 8 Social Work liaise with key agencies to ensure a cohesive package of support is in place.

3.2.2 **Education:** The importance of education services to the life chances of children is no less critical for those who are looked after. The disadvantages experienced by this group, however, mean that they often require significantly greater support and understanding to benefit from their education and often provide a greater challenge to services to ensure their needs are met.

3.2.3 Education is a means of increasing opportunities and redressing social disadvantage. Schools provide the setting for looked after children to achieve success and develop social relationships, confidence and self-esteem. An amendment to the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 presumes that a looked after child has additional supports needs and in consequence requires that establishments must consider the child's needs. Where looked after children have identified needs they must receive the necessary additional support to meet these needs. Resources should target this group and provide:

- The necessary additional support to avoid looked after children being inappropriately excluded from school.
- Focused support to assist looked after children in raising their educational achievement and attainment.
- A relevant curriculum, designed to met the assessed need and personal aspirations of looked after young people to enable and encourage them to gain good employment and training.
- Active participation in care and protection planning and delivery of agreed multi-agency support packages.

**Outcome:** Looked after children / looked after and accommodated children achieve their full learning potential and are provided with the support necessary to achieve this objective:

- 1 Future educational needs are identified and met for this care group.
- 2 Children who are looked after / looked after and accommodated are not excluded from school unless another full-time alternative is found.
- 3 School staff identify the educational needs of looked after children / looked after and accommodated children in their establishments.
- 4 Education staff contribute to the looked after children / looked after and accommodated children planning processes.
- 5 All looked after children / looked after and accommodated children have a dedicated educational plan.
- 6 Additional support is made available where need is identified.
- 7 All efforts are made for the child/ young person to attend their own school during periods of being looked after.

3.2.4 **Community Services and Sports Development:** The principles of the corporate parent should be reflected in community services' commitment to provide targeted support for disadvantaged communities.

3.2.5 Looked after children and young people may be excluded from mainstream community and leisure activities, often because they require additional support and assistance to access opportunities or to make positive, effective use of them.

3.2.6 Some young people may opt out of positive opportunities because these do not seem relevant to them. Children and young people who are looked after and accommodated may require significant levels of assistance to enjoy the positive, inclusive experiences that are otherwise easily available to the general population.

3.2.7 Resources should target looked after children and young people in order to ensure effective additional support to allow access to community leisure facilities and activities that build young people's self-esteem and contribute to their overall development.

**Outcome:** Young people who are looked after or are looked after and accommodated have the opportunity to pursue informal learning and leisure interests and are supported to overcome personal barriers and make best use of community facilities.

1. Community Learning and Development staff target community based learning opportunities and awards schemes to this group of children and young people
2. Community Leisure facilities are welcoming of looked after and looked after and accommodated children and young people
3. Agreements are in place to maximise the benefit of public leisure facilities for this Group.
4. Care plans include informal learning and leisure pursuits, children and young people's engagement in their own communities and address any identified barriers to achieving these.

3.2.8 **Housing:** young people who are, or have been looked after, are often heavily dependent on housing services at a much younger age than children from the general population. It is recognised in national policy documents they are vulnerable to being homeless both at a young age and at later stages in life because of difficulties in sustaining relationships.

3.2.9 The role of the Council as corporate parent includes the responsibility to provide good quality

accommodation to looked after and previously looked after young people to avoid homelessness occurring. This vulnerable group also require to be fully supported by services to enable them to be responsible citizens and make a positive contribution to their local communities. Resources should target this group of young people and provide:

- On-going support to prevent homelessness occurring.
- Tailored support to looked after and previously looked after young people who are at risk of becoming homeless.
- Ongoing support to reduce unplanned housing moves.
- Establishment of adequate levels of local supported accommodation for looked after young people.
- A range of supports which prevent vulnerable young people being inappropriately placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.

**Outcome:** Young people who are looked after or are looked after and accommodated are provided with appropriate accommodation and supported to maintain tenancies to the standard required and positively contribute to their local community.

- 1 The Housing Service ensures that strategic plans and policies respond to the needs of looked after children / looked after and accommodated children care group and that protocols are in place.
- 2 The Housing Service works with others to ensure that strategies and plans address the prevention of homelessness for this group.
- 3 Plans to ensure future needs are met, are developed and implemented.
- 4 The Housing Service liaises with housing providers and other landlords to identify suitable options.
- 5 Housing staff contribute to the pathway planning process and attend meetings where accommodation needs have been identified.
- 6 Housing staff work with partners to effectively plan a young person's transition from care to avoid unnecessary homelessness.
- 7 Community Safety and Housing staff ensure that anti-social behaviour strategies reflect understanding of the corporate parenting role
- 8 Housing staff monitor the quality of accommodation offered to this group

3.3 For Partner Agencies:

3.3.1 **Health:** The early experiences of looked after children and young people often include limited or infrequent access to health services. This can have a very negative impact on their actual health and on their future life chances. The role of corporate parent requires

very specific efforts by health services to ensure that our children's health is monitored regularly and their health needs addressed effectively.

- 3.3.2 Health Services contribute to the role of corporate parent by prioritising services for looked after and accommodated children and young people. Health also plays an equal and active role in key multi-agency services such as child protection, substance misuse and health improvement, including mental health and sexual health, which are particularly relevant for looked after children.

**Outcome:** The health and wellbeing of looked after and looked after and accommodated children are identified and addressed.

- 1 - Comprehensive health assessments are completed and implemented for all accommodated children
- 2 - Health Services ensure there is capacity to respond, timeously, to the health needs of looked after children and young people
- 3 - Health staff contribute to the looked after children / looked after and accommodated children planning and review processes
- 4 - Health staff will attend looked after children / looked after and accommodated children meetings
- 5 - The Health Service will ensure that strategic plans respond to the needs of looked after children / looked after and accommodated children care group
- 6 - The profile of looked after children / looked after and accommodated children is raised within universal health services
- 7 - The concept of health promoting schools is expanded to establish health promoting children's services

- 3.3.3 **Commissioned Services:** Services to children and young people are increasingly purchased from voluntary organisations and private providers. In recognition of the need for consistency of provision, a prioritisation framework should be agreed among all partners to ensure that scarce resources are targeted effectively. Looked after and accommodated children and young people are an agreed priority of the DCYPP.

#### **4.0 Monitoring Arrangements**

- 4.1 The effectiveness of the corporate parent role should be measured by the extent to which outcomes for looked after children and young people are improved over time. There are two essential elements on which progress depends. First is the need for partners to adopt fully the principles of shared responsibility for this group of children and to work together, allocating resources and prioritising services accordingly. Second, is the need for a clear framework for monitoring and evaluation, based on relevant and accurate performance information.
- 4.2 The monitoring framework should link to the monitoring mechanisms and performance reporting and should answer the following questions, for example:
- How many children are looked after and looked after and accommodated?

- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- Where are they placed?
- How old are they?
- Are they safe and how do we know?
- How well are they looked after and how do we know?
- How many are in mainstream school?
- How many are in special educational provision?
- How many are in further or higher education?
- What are the patterns of school exclusions in relation to this group?
- How well are they doing in school?
- How are their health needs assessed?
- What are their housing needs and how are these being met?
- What support is being provided to young people moving on to independence?
- How many young people are involved in offending behaviour?
- How many young people were involved in non-offence related matters?
- How many of these children and young people are missing persons?
- What action is being taken to reduce offending behaviour?
- What are our local trends?
- How do our outcomes compare with the national trends?

4.3 How we are going to measure our progress in relation to children and young people who are looked after and accommodated should be clearly set out in a Quality Assurance Plan which should underpin our Children and Young People's Services Plan, with our findings being reported at agreed frequency to the relevant scrutiny body.

4.4 The implementation of the corporate Parenting Policy needs to be linked to a number of existing strands of work, particularly the work that has been ongoing through the existing joint planning structures, the implementation of the revised protocol for Looked After Children and the emerging work on a developing integrated Quality Assurance and Improvement Policy for Children's Services which embeds self evaluation in all that we do and ensures that arrangements are put in place to quality assure the education and care of looked after children. This needs to be pulled together into a single action plan under the auspices of the proposed Champions' Board and reported on an annual basis to the Community Planning Partnership Board.

4.5 Of particular significance in the implementation of the corporate parenting policy are the following areas of work:

4.5.1 **Monitoring Outcomes** – Assessing Performance: A schedule of joint self-evaluation to address Child Protection, Corporate Parenting and the implementation of GIRFEC will be developed. Agreed quality indicators will be used in Learning Localities and across partner services in order to evaluate improved outcomes for looked after children, in terms of their educational attainment and social and emotional well-being.

4.5.2 **Quality Audit:** East Dunbartonshire Council will undertake a Quality Audit of the present care, attendance and achievements of looked after children and set targets for future improvement. This requires the establishment of a shared system including criteria for judging performance within education and social work services.

- 4.5.3 **Elected members – awareness raising:** A programme of awareness raising sessions will be delivered to ensure that elected members and the corporate management team are fully briefed on the context for children and young people looked after, the issues facing the Council in providing appropriate care, and the responsibilities of the corporate parent.
- 4.5.4 **Training:** The delivery of training to community planning partners and elected members to ensure there is a clear and shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, in relation to ensuring that safe care is provided to children and young people who are looked after.
- 4.5.5 **Our Children and Young People Are Ready to Learn Themed Group:** This group will be tasked with analysing current trends and developing models of support, within schools and care settings, to support and improve the educational attainment and achievement of looked after and looked after and accommodated children and young people.
- 4.5.6 **Annual report on looked after and looked after and accommodation children and young people (LAC/LAAC):** an annual report on looked after and looked after and accommodated children and young people will be developed for DCYPP and will include information on educational attainment, health needs and outcomes for children looked after and those accommodated across the spectrum of resources, including for those young people leaving care. This will afford the Community Planning Partnership Board the opportunity to gauge its performance against its corporate parenting responsibilities and identify any remedial action required.
- 4.5.7 **Engagement of Children and Young People:** Some initial work has been undertaken to engage children and young people who are looked after in the development and implementation of services using the quality indicators for self evaluation. It is critical to the successful implementation of the Corporate Parenting Policy that elected members are both kept informed of and are involved in this work to ensure the views of children and young people shape the Council’s policy and service development.
- 4.5.8 **Multi-agency resource groups:** These groups are being developed as part of a streamlined service implementation structure, based on the principles of Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC). The new Executive Liaison Group will be tasked with reviewing quality assurance arrangements and ensuring appropriate placements for looked after children and young people and those who are looked after and accommodated.