

Looked After Children Strategy

Corporate Parenting – Dec 2011

*Thurrock
Children,
Education &
Families*

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About this document

<i>Title:</i>	LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STRATEGY
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Vision for Thurrock:

We want Thurrock to be the dynamic heart of the Thames Gateway, a place of ambition, enterprise and opportunity, where communities and businesses flourish.

Achieving Our Vision:

To achieve our vision, we have identified five community priorities:

1. Improve the education and skills of local people.
2. Encourage and promote job creation and economic prosperity.
3. Ensure a safe, clean and green environment.
4. Provide and commission high quality and accessible services that meet, wherever possible, individual needs.
5. Build pride, respect and responsibility in Thurrock's communities and its residents.

Our aim:

Our aim is to become a confident, well managed and influential council regarded by residents, peers and partners as ambitious for the people of Thurrock and totally focused on meeting their current and future aspirations.

Four Pillars of the Children and Young Peoples plan

Excellent childcare, schools, colleges and services

- Raise attainment and promote engagement, resilience, active learning and economic wellbeing.
- Ensure high quality education training and services for children, young people and families.
- Ensure progression routes to higher level qualifications.

Everyone Succeeding

- Promote the attainment and achievement of under-achieving children
- Promote and support inclusion
- Reduce and mitigate the impact of child poverty and disadvantage.

Protection When Needed

- Build parental and family resilience
- Deliver outstanding services for children who have been or may be abused
- Commission or deliver outstanding services for disabled children, children in trouble and children in care

Lean and Fit for the Future

- Strong & resilient governance & leadership across the Children's Partnership & LSCB
- Strong organisational discipline
- Effective resource use through integrated strategic commissioning, capital and financial planning

Looked After Children Strategy

This strategy defines how we use the terms 'Looked After Children' and 'Care Leavers', states our key aspirations and service priorities, indicates our focus over the next two years and, in Appendix A, provides a summary of the profile of Looked After Children and Care Leavers in Thurrock.

We must remember, elected members have the statutory duty of being corporate parents and are accountable to the public.

We wish to see our council look at those we have responsibilities to with the same care and attention as we would look at our own children.

As such we need a service where Elected Members can play a real role and step up to the duty of being corporate parents as well as having genuine accountability from our directors in an often unseen service.

In addition our service must include those it serves. Thus we will strive to seek the views and input of those with the most intimate insights on the service and the council - young people and looked after children themselves.

- Our stance is further confirmed in Appendix 2

1. Definitions

A Looked After Child is a child who is:

- subject to a Care Order or Interim Care Order or Emergency Protection Order; or
- accommodated under a voluntary agreement with those who have Parental Responsibility for her/him under Section 20 The Children Act 1989, or where those with parental responsibility are unable to exercise it through ill-health or absence, e.g. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

A Care Leaver is a young person who:

- has been looked after by the local authority and for whom the authority has a duty to keep in touch with and support when they leave the care system at age 18 years. The authority's responsibility lasts up until the age of 25 if the young person remains in education.

2. Key Aspirations

Looked After Children in Thurrock will both be cared for and cared about; we will strive to seek the same good outcomes that any good parent would want for their own child.

Our vision of Looked After Children is:

- For every child and young person in care to have the same chances we would want for our own children;
- For our children and young people to be safe, healthy, confident and ambitious; not disadvantaged in any way. We want them to enjoy life, building resilience and relationships that will sustain them into adulthood;
- To develop a culture whereby all - Members, officers and staff – as Corporate Parents - understand the Corporate Parenting agenda and work to improve positive outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. This concern should encompass their health, education and leisure time, encouraging achievement and aspiration; and the cabinet member and the shadow cabinet member are able to present a positive appraisal of corporate parenting and this strategy to full council (outside the realms of the regular portfolio holder report)
- That children are best raised by their own families and within their local community. In Thurrock, all partner agencies will work together to ensure that services are in place to support families to care for their own children and to reserve care for those children and young people who are in need of protection and for whom care is the only way to meet their needs;
- that participation of children, young people and their carers in all areas of the Council's work is essential if it is to respond to the needs of its service users and community. We will work with the Children in Care Council to ensure that the aims set out in this strategy are achieved.
- All looked after children and care leavers must be aware of the responsibility that elected members have to them and the existence of the corporate parenting committee as the formal forum for them to have their views heard

3. Service Priorities

The strategy has the following objectives:

- To reserve public care for those children for whom there is no safe and appropriate alternative.
- To deliver outstanding fostering, private fostering and adoption; develop and maintain excellent services for children in care.
- Young people who are looked after and care leavers face a number of disadvantages and challenges as they make the move to independence. In order to make the transition to independence as smooth as possible and ensure they go on to fulfil their potential in the future it is vital that they receive additional help and support.

- To provide the best possible educational provision for our children and young people who are looked after.
- To ensure that members can engage with young people and carers and that young people and carers can engage with elected members at regular intervals
- Adopt the government's guidelines on corporate parenting, found in Appendix 2.

3.1 Corporate Parenting and Children's Rights

We will:

- promote and ensure that Corporate Parenting responsibilities are widely understood and that networks, contacts and partnerships are developed that can contribute to good outcomes for Looked After Children;
- develop the Children's Rights Service with looked after children and care leavers at the centre to advise and consult; and
- develop the Children in Care Council, that is chaired or vice chaired by a care leaver and ensure that Looked After Children and Care Leavers are involved in the development of key policies that impact on them, including a Looked After Children's pledge. The children in care council should be represented at each corporate parenting meeting.

3.2 Placement Stability

We will:

- provide placement choice and improve placement stability;
- increase the numbers of in house foster carers and kinship carers;
- ensure that Thurrock children are placed as close to their home communities as possible, provided this is in their best interests;
- ensure that the needs of Looked After Children from black and minority ethnic and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) groups are taken fully into account in any operational or policy development;
- aim to reduce spending on Independent Fostering Agencies and Residential Care in order to re-invest funds in local services; and
- ensure that payments to carers remain competitive in what is a highly competitive market place.

3.3 Health and Wellbeing

We will:

- continue to progress the priorities set out in the work plans for the Health Steering Group and Multi-Agency Looked After Children Group (MALAC);
- develop therapeutic support services for children, young people and carers as part of our broader CAMHS strategy; and
- ensure that Initial Health Assessments and Review Health Assessments are undertaken within agreed timescales.
- ensure the relevant Overview and Scrutiny committees are allowed to be a critical friend in the area of ensuring a quality care service by referring relevant data to Overview and Scrutiny, in a timely manner.
- ensure that the health and well-being of Looked After Children will be included in the reports about children being made to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

3.4 Education

We will:

- raise attainment levels of Looked After Children, year on year;
- increase the number of Care Leavers who are in education, training or employment, in line with the England average;
- provide a Virtual School for Looked After Children that supports schools and designated teachers in meeting needs, particularly for those children with challenging behaviour; and
- promote high aspirations for our Looked After Children and increase the number going on to higher education whether this be in supporting academic, vocational or manual studies in Thurrock colleges and sixth forms.
- Establish a dialogue with our academy institutions to report back to corporate parenting through the Lead Member for Education about Looked After Children in non Local Education Authority areas, through the Lead Member for Education.

3.5 Accommodation and Support

We will:

- develop the supported lodgings service to meet the need of 16 – 18 year olds;
- work jointly with the Housing Service (through the Lead Member) to ensure the needs of Care Leavers remains a central priority within the Service; and that special attention be given to LAC, in a manner similar to the veterans charter being shaped by the Council; and
- work with the Strategic Commissioning Team to develop more supported accommodation options.

4. Success Measures for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Will include:

- being cared for by staff and carers who are safely recruited, trained, supervised and managed to deliver the highest quality service;
- having improved care planning which leads to more effective and timely responses;
- having their views sought and listened to, leading to relevant action;
- improved educational attainment as compared against the statistical neighbours, with attention to other unitary authorities;
- being supported in planning for their future and engaged in education, employment and training opportunities which will support them in achieving future economic well being and success;
- placements offered to our young people being judged good by external inspection;
- sustained placements, leading to fewer moves;
- a reduction in the number of Looked After Children, year-on-year and a reduction in the number of children placed outside the authority, year-on-year;
- improvements in physical health, emotional wellbeing and confidence;
- a reduction in the number of Care Leavers who are evicted or placed in unsuitable accommodation; and

- that members are able to endorse the councils approach to LAC via corporate parenting when this strategy is reviewed.

Appendix One

Who are our Looked After Children?

There are approximately 60,000 children and young people who are looked after in England at any one time. In Sept 2011 there were 242 Thurrock Looked After Children in this group:

- 55% of our Looked After Children are boys/young men and 46% are girls/young women.
- 48% are under 12 and 52% are over 12.
- 21% are from a minority ethnic background with the majority of this group coming from an Asian background.
- 10% are physically disabled.
- 23 have a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- 50% of our looked after children live outside Thurrock and most of these live in Essex.
- 83% live with foster-carers.
- 42.9% are not in education, training or employment at age 19.
- We are supporting 107 care leavers between the ages of 18 – 25.

Appendix 2

Government guidelines on corporate parenting

1. **Corporate Parenting** is when the local authority takes on the role of a good parent to the children in its care. “Corporate Parenting cannot 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.
2. **Children in the care of a local authority – know as children ‘looked after’ – have the same rights as all children** to be healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve and contribute to society. The council as a whole acts as a ‘Corporate Parent’ with a duty to promote these rights for the children in its care. Each individual councillor has a responsibility to support the Corporate Parent role.
3. **Good parents involve their children and listen to their views.** Councils must find ways to involve looked after children, not only in their own individual care plans, but also in service planning. Children in your care must know who to contact when they have something to say about their own care as well as about how the care system could be improved.
4. **Parents need to know how their children are getting on.** Councillors should be able to monitor their council’s success as Corporate Parent. You should know how many children you look after, and in what settings – more than 70 per cent nationally live in foster care. You should have information about school attendance and achievements, health and dental checks, the cost, quality and outcomes of family and residential home placements. You should compare these figures for all children and with other authorities. You should not expect to receive personal information about individual children, which your officers should ensure is kept private.
5. **Families try to provide a stable environment for their children and to support them through change.** Your policies should aim to minimise disruption for looked-after children and reduce the likelihood of changes of home and school. Planning should make continuity of care, education and social support a priority. Procedures should recognise and provide extra support when change is unavoidable.
6. **Parents want their children to stay out of trouble.** Most children come into care after neglect or abuse, not because of wrongdoing. Yet almost four times as many children in care may become offenders. Councils have a responsibility to reduce this risk. Measures shown to help include greater support (including financial support) and training for foster parents, access to good leisure services and good communication with police and youth offending services. You need to know what arrangements your council has for tackling this issue.

7. **Families don't bring up their children alone.** As a Corporate Parent, your council must work with other agencies, including health, education, employment, leisure, housing and voluntary and private sector organisations involved in the care of children. Your children and young people's plan should set out how agencies will work together to support looked after children.
8. **Families often share roles.** Your council should have a Lead Member for Looked After Children. Your Director for Children's Services should arrange training, meet with representative organisations and groups of looked after children, and ceremonies to celebrate achievement. You might meet individual children or undertake visits to children's homes, including spot checks.
9. **Good parents are honest and open to their children** and do not make promises to them that they cannot keep. The authority's policies should include to give looked after children realistic expectations of your council as a Corporate Parent. They should understand the limitations placed on you, as well as opportunities that they have.
10. **A parent's interest in their child doesn't stop when they leave school or home.** Corporate Parents have specific duties to those in care, to keep in touch and offer support (including financial support). Councils should allocate resources to this area and monitor their work. Young people leaving care should know they can count on your support.