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Title	Shropshire Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-24
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Council Priority	Healthy People
Lead author & contact details	Siobhan Williams
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Shropshire Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-24

Revised Draft October 2021

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Charter for Children in Care & Care Leavers

The council should use these priorities when they are making decisions that will affect young people's lives. This document aims to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what the council should do to be good corporate parents. This charter will try to ensure that all children in care and care leavers have equal access to services, support and life opportunities.

My Health
Offer me advice and opportunities to help me be healthy. Give me easy and open access to health services, including sexual and mental health.

Education, Work and Training
Provide me with a suitable education, a budget if I choose to go onto university, and help seeking employment, training or education. Shropshire Council should continue to provide young people in care the chance to do work experience with the council as if it was the 'family firm'.

My Social Life
Make my life fun! Provide opportunities and activities for me to take part in.

Support
Support me in my endeavours. Offer me practical and financial support. Give me access safe people to turn to when I am upset or angry, and the chance to talk things through with someone who is not part of the council.



Generally
Respect me and treat me fairly, and as an individual. Be honest and don't make promises you can't keep. Do your best to promote children in care and make sure they don't get a bad name. Acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of children in care.

My Voice
Listen to my views and opinions. Put my needs and feelings at the heart of all decisions about me. Ask me what I think and I want to do. If you don't agree then tell me why.

My Home
Give me carers who are people-friendly and a home that is appropriate to my individual needs. Offer me a home where I can be safe and happy, not just a bed. Don't forget about me if I live far from home. Help me to move onto independent living when I am ready.

Inform Me
Explain to me what my rights are. Tell me what I'm entitled to and what I can ask for at different points of my life. Give me clear information about myself and my time in care when I want it.

Moving On
Plan for the future with me clearly, and be ready to put support in place if things go wrong. Prepare me before it's time to move on, with things like life skills, cooking, driving and money management.

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1.1 Introduction

Welcome to Shropshire's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024.

'Corporate Parenting in Shropshire is the term used to refer to the responsibility of the council, to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are 'looked after'. At the core of this responsibility is our moral duty to provide the kind of support and care that any good parents would provide their own children. This includes enhancing the quality of life of looked after children as well as keeping them safe.'

In February 2018 The Department for Education published Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities for applying Corporate Parenting Principles for children in their care and care leavers. As corporate parents, elected members and council officers have a statutory responsibility for the wellbeing of children in care. Elected members play a large part in holding officers and partners to account as well as being proactive in the corporate parenting role themselves.

Our Corporate Parenting strategy describes how Shropshire and its partners, such as housing, health services, Police and schools, act as 'responsible parents' to children and young people living within their care. Effective corporate parenting requires everyone involved including elected members, officers, teachers, GP's etc. to recognise their role as

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corporate parents and understand what they can contribute to enable us to be the best corporate parents we can be to all children and young people in our care.

It is our responsibility to make sure that children and young people for whom we are responsible feel safe and secure, have stability in their lives, and that they are supported to achieve their full potential and fulfil their ambitions and aspirations.

What is clear is that no single service operating alone can hope to meet the needs of the children in our care or their families. We need to establish close, coordinated working relationships with partners if we are to succeed in improving outcomes for our children – now and in the future.

Shropshire is fully committed to working in partnership with wider services, and with children and young people to achieve this. In this regard Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most important jobs that councils do and when a child or young person, for whatever reason, can't safely stay at home, it is up to us as the local authority in Shropshire to step in and give them the care, support and stability that they deserve so that they feel safe and as leaders of the Council, we will achieve our ambitions through:



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- Strong leadership and robust performance management.
- Maintaining the engagement and involvement of children, young people and care leavers in developing and implementing our strategy.
- Inclusive and effective partnership working across Shropshire with support from identified elected member champions to each priority theme.

We are passionate and deeply committed to our children in care and our care leavers, and it is with great excitement and a profound sense of our personal accountability that we approach the delivery of this Corporate Parenting strategy for 2022 to 2025.

Leader of the Council

Picture

**Executive Director of
People**

Picture

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1.2 Foreword

This Strategy sets out Shropshire Council's vision and commitment and explains how we, as the Council, will be an effective and trustworthy corporate parent for every child and young person who is in our care, respecting their unique individuality and valuing their diverse needs and views relating to their age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or disability.

Hearing and responding to the lived experience and voices of our children and looked after young people will be the 'Golden Thread' driving our Strategy in Shropshire.

The Strategy sets out our priorities over the next 3 years against the Corporate Parenting Principles, taking account of the Care Leavers' Covenant, the Children's Charter and the Council's Pledge.

Every professional who works with children and young people looked after and care leavers has a responsibility as a corporate parent. This can be a social worker, councillor or other professionals who work in police, health, housing, probation and education.

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"The role that councils play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. Local authorities have a unique responsibility to the children they look after and their care leavers"

(Children and Social Work Act 2017)

Being a corporate parent means providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by the council. We intend to be ***the best parent that we can be*** to every child and young person we look after. We expect the same as would be good enough for our own children.

As a good corporate parent, we will listen to and include children and young people in plans about them and for them and our children looked after, and care experienced young people will be integrally involved in progressing this Strategy.

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2. The Corporate Parenting Principles

Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 states that local authorities must have regard to the seven Corporate Parenting Principles identified in the Children and Social Work Act when exercising their functions in relation to children and young people looked after and care leavers:

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 those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

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3. Shropshire's Children's Charter

There is a Children's Charter in place which was first co-produced with our children and young people in 2013. This Charter is in the process of being reviewed again with our children and young people. The Shropshire Children's Charter is widely available across the Council and relates to 9 key areas that are important to looked after children:

- Health
- Education, work and training
- Social life
- Support
- Inform me
- Moving on
- My home
- My voice
- General issues

The Corporate Parenting Steering Group, the council and elected members have signed up to the Children's Charter.

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4. Our Corporate Parenting Pledge

Every good parent knows that children need a safe and secure environment in which to grow and thrive in life. As parents we want to protect and support our children against the dangers and risks that present through life. Parents are ambitious for our children and we want them to reach their potential. As good parents we celebrate and share in the achievements of our children and, as young people, we want to set them on the road towards adulthood with all the guidance, support and opportunities we can provide.

A child who is cared for by the Council has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a good parent.

This means as a Council we will:

- Know our children, their needs, talents and aspirations and promote their interests
- Hold high aspirations for their future and expect the best for and from them
- Take an interest in their successes and problems and show our pride in their achievements, and celebrate them
- Listen to their views and ensure they influence practice, service developments and policy.
- Ensure they are consulted about their own lives and plans



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- Recognise, support and respect their identity in all aspects
- Ensure our children attend their education regularly
- Promote and support high academic achievement by working with our schools and carers to ensure that the needs of our children are understood and met
- Support their health and emotional well-being and resilience
- Support transition to adult life and promote their economic prospects & prepare them to become responsible citizens
- **and most importantly....** as Corporate Parents we will preface all our thinking, planning, actions and decisions with:

“would this be good enough for my child.....”

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4.1 Our Corporate Parenting Values

We will hold high aspirations for our children looked after and high expectations for ourselves as corporate parents.

As a partnership we will continuously ask ourselves: “is this what a good parent would do?”
“Would this be good enough for my child?”

The answers to these questions will underpin our conversations, work and support with children looked after and care experienced young people. Every good parent knows that children need a safe and secure environment in which to grow and thrive. Parents protect and support their children against the dangers and risks of life. Parents are ambitious for them and want them to reach their full potential. Parents celebrate and share their children’s achievements.

A good parent is also a good listener responding positively to what their children say. A child who is cared for by the council has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a good parent, within a safe, secure and supportive home.

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We will take a partnership approach to corporate parenting

For corporate parenting to be effective it needs commitment from all elected members, council employees and partners.

The whole council needs to be involved, as well as our partners, all acting as good parents, committing resources and working together to improve the lives of all children and young people in our care.

We will support our foster carers and deliver against our commitments within Shropshire Charter.

We will champion children looked after and care leavers in everything we do.

All council offers, elected members and partners will champion children looked after and care leavers within all their work to ensure this group of young people are recognised and their individual needs met.

Shropshire have also adopted elected members to be corporate parent thematic champions. We will question, and where necessary challenge, aspects of services to ensure they have a focus on children looked after and care experienced young people. This role should be active and not passive, as

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corporate parents are ultimately responsible for the quality of care provided and securing good outcomes for our children and young people.

We will recognise all children and young people as individuals

We will be effective and trustworthy corporate parents for children and young people in our care irrespective of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or disability. We recognise that children come into care for different reasons with different needs.

We will ensure that provision is bespoke and builds on universal and preventative services.

We shall also ensure our young people receive good-quality advice and support when they leave care. We will support young people to understand and celebrate their own culture and identity, recognising and understand individual needs. We will listen to the lived experiences of children looked after and care experienced young people and involve them in shaping our support and services. Across our services we will continuously listen to young people to understand their needs, experiences and views to influence practice, service and policy changes. We will take an interest in their successes and problems and celebrate their achievements.

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5. A 'Whole Council' commitment

For Corporate Parenting to be effective it needs a commitment from all elected members and council employees in a council-wide approach as well as from partner agencies who work to support the best interests of looked after children. It involves the whole council and its partners acting as a good parent, committing resources and working together to improve the lives of all children and young people in care and care leavers. It is about prioritising their needs, listening to and valuing their views based on their lived experience, and supporting them to make the most of their lives.

Professionals with responsibility for our children looked after meet on a regular basis to discuss the important issues involving looked after children and care leavers in Shropshire and to identify what further work or action is needed to support and help our looked after children succeed in life. This is called the Shropshire Corporate Parenting Steering Board. Young people from the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum report directly to the Board on issues impacting directly on children and young people looked after and care leavers. This ensures all corporate parents fully understand the key issues for all children and young people looked after so that they can consider what action they themselves or their agency can take to promote their best interests.

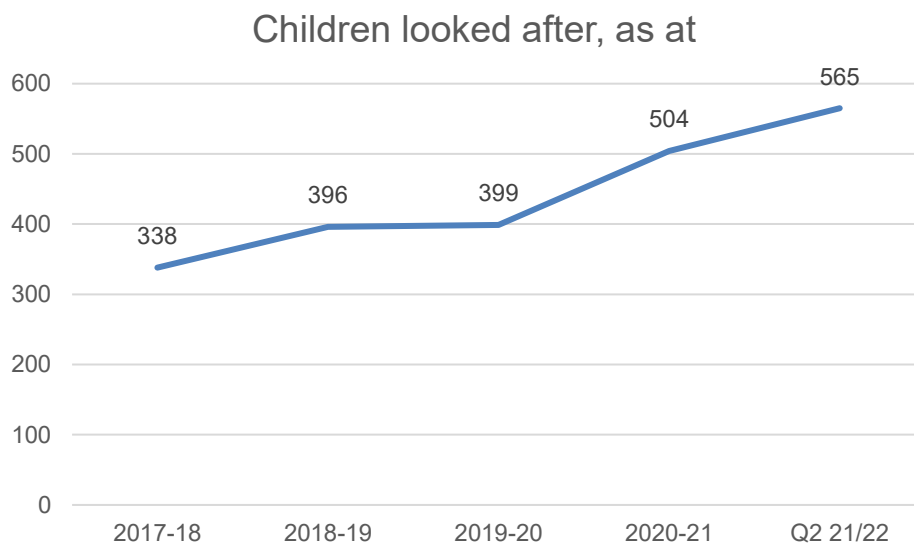
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The Corporate Parent Steering Board will identify actions to be taken, set priorities and will hold agencies to account to ensure all agencies are effective corporate parents. *(Corporate Parenting Steering Board Appendix 1.)*

6. Context

In Shropshire, the number of children looked after has grown since 2017-18, with a significant increase during 2020-21. In year data suggests that this increase is continuing into 21-22:

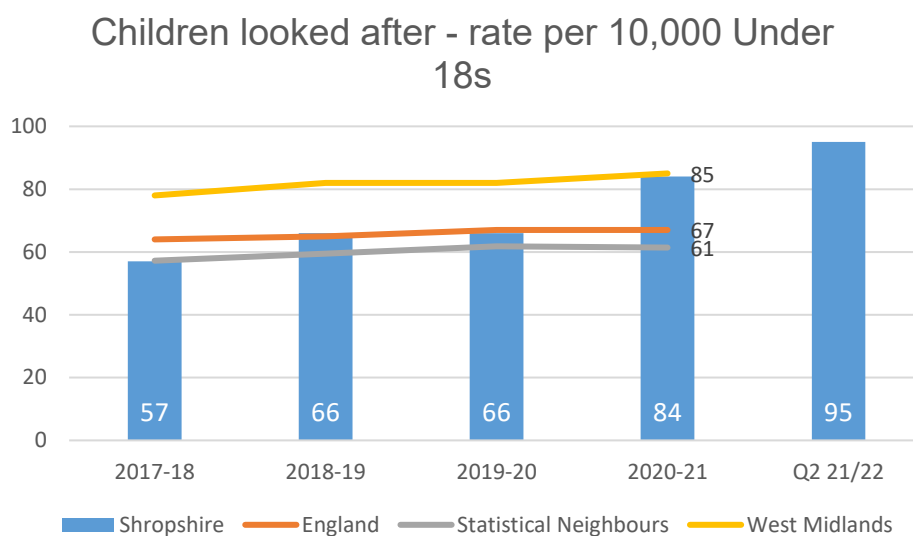


This increase can be compared to the national, regional, and statistical neighbour group, using a rate per 10,000 0-17-year-olds, to allow for population differences.

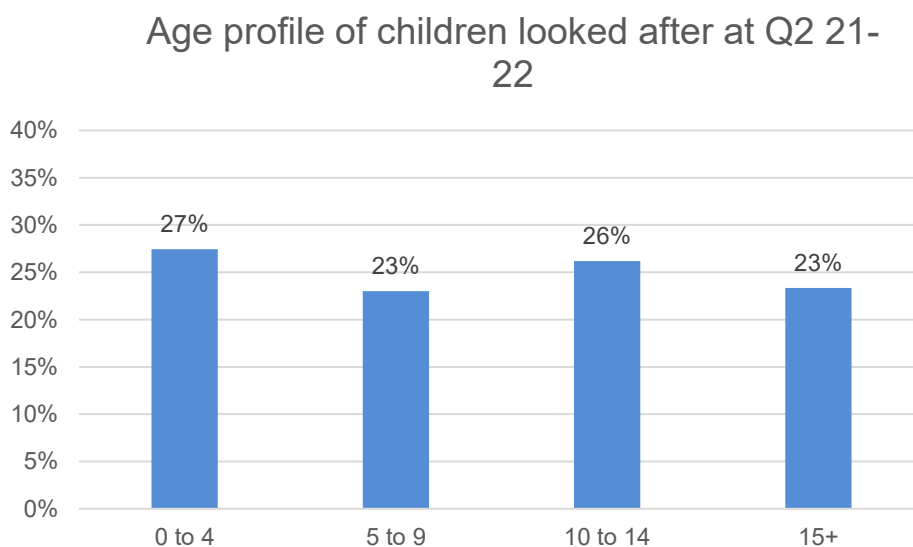
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The chart below shows that Shropshire has a higher rate at the end of Q2 21-22 than the latest comparator data from year-end 20-21.



The age profile of children looked after in Shropshire at Q2 21/22 suggests an even distribution across age ranges.



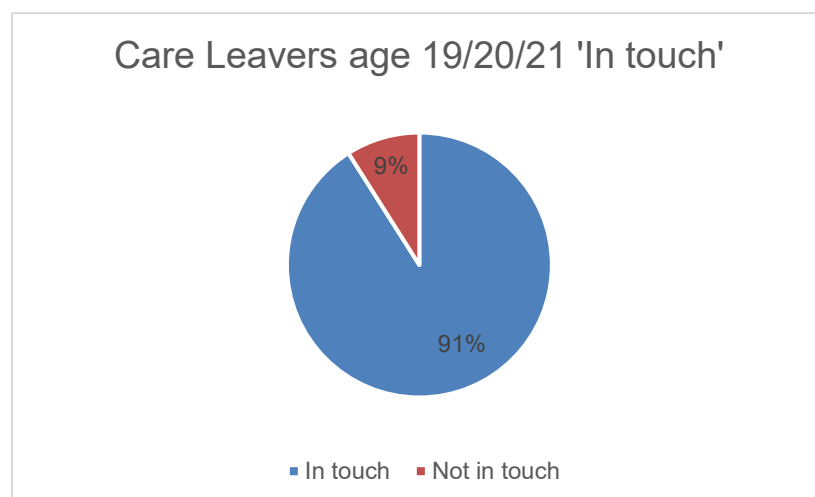
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In Shropshire, 50% of children looked after are in the younger age range of 0-9, this is more than the national average of 38%.

Care Leavers

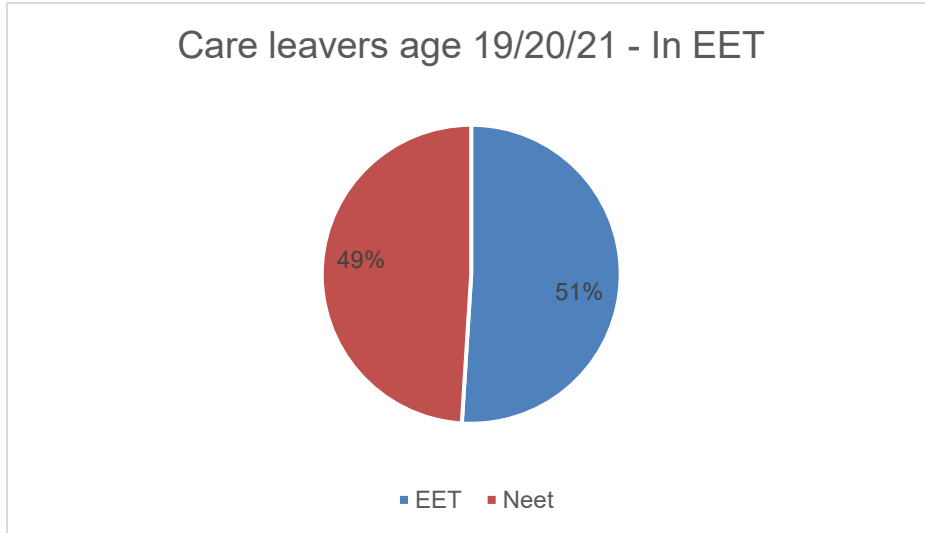
At the end of 20-21 Shropshire Council was in touch with 91% of Care Leavers aged 19/20/21. This is in line with the national average (91%).



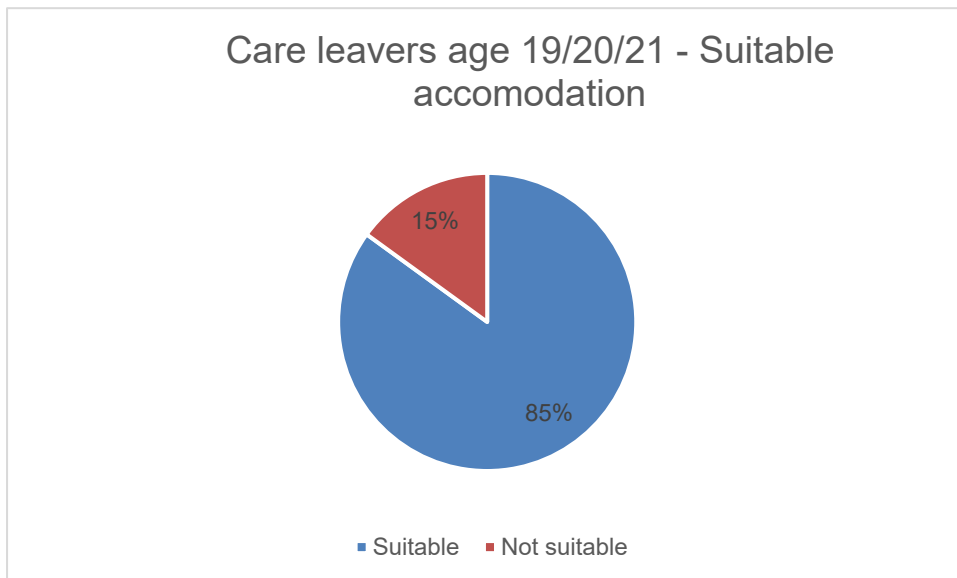
51% of care leavers at year end 20/21, age 19/20/21, were in education, employment or training, in line with the national average of 52%.

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At year end 20/21, 85% of care leavers age 19/20/21 were in suitable accommodation, slightly lower than the national average of 88%.



In year data suggests improvements have been achieved across these three areas.

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Shropshire Council aims to support the majority of its children and young people within their own families and communities. However, for a small number of children and young people this is not possible, and they require alternative care, sometimes only for a short time, but also for some children and young people, this can be until they are young adults.

Children and young people are looked after either by a Court Order made in public law proceedings, or with the agreement of the child's parent or guardian. A child or young person may become looked after as a result of temporary or permanent problems facing their parents, as a result of abuse or neglect or a range of difficulties; those children with a disability or complex needs that require specialised care outside a family home; those in shared care/respite arrangements; those remanded into care – criminal proceedings- and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Corporate parenting responsibilities can extend to the age of 25 for those young people who ceased to be 'looked after' as they reached adulthood from 16- 18 years or were formally looked after prior to the making of an Adoption Order or Special Guardianship Order.

Shropshire Council is committed to supporting and enabling children and young people to live within a permanent family

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environment. If this cannot be through remaining with or being reunified with one or both birth parents, then we aim to support the child's own extended family if someone can care for them safely.

We will always encourage, and support connected carers to seek permanence with support but the least state interference where possible through use of Special Guardianship or private law orders.

If this is not possible, then Shropshire Council is committed to securing each individual child or young person with a permanent home to adulthood, and beyond if possible. This could be through adoption or with long-term foster carers.

For a very few children, their level of disability or complex needs means they require a specialist level of care that cannot be provided within a family home. We aim to ensure residential provision is within or as close to Shropshire as possible and that their lifelong family links are promoted and enabled.

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This reinforces our view that permanency provides the best environment for children to feel safe and secure which will enable them to achieve happy and fulfilling lives.

As our young people move towards adulthood, we aim to enable them to have the skills and means to support themselves and look after their own health and safety where possible. We will ensure they can move to their own accommodation where this meets their needs, and to ensure they live somewhere with the right level of support if their assessed needs require this. We aim to enable them to have lifelong links with people close to them and the ability to make safe and healthy relationships.

Many children looked after are at greater risk of social exclusion than their non-looked after peers, both because of their experiences prior to becoming looked after, and by virtue of the fact that they are often separated from their birth parents, and from their extended birth families and the community they grew up in. It is essential, therefore, that the Council, as a Corporate Parent, ensures that their experience of being looked after is a positive and supportive one and maximizes their full potential.

A good corporate parent must address the challenges and difficulties children and young people looked after experience and the challenges of parenting within a complex system of different services.

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While good parenting requires continuity, organisations by their nature are continuously changing. Elected members and employees move on and structures, procedures and partnerships are modified and refined. One challenge of being a good corporate parent is to manage these changes and ensuring each individual child and young person has the opportunity to maintain a sense of stability.

We need to make sure that children and young people feel safe and secure have stability in their lives and that we help them to achieve their full potential by supporting them in fulfilling their ambitions and aspirations.

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7. Our Vision and Underlying Values

Our vision mirrors that in “Care Matters: Time to deliver for children in care” DCSF 2008:

“Our aspirations for children in care reflect those we would have for our own children. We know they are often in much greater need than other children and we must ensure they obtain all the help they require. We aim to create a home and community environment that provides every child with a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to meet their full potential”

Children and young people in care are all individuals, coming from all walks of life and have different aspirations and ambitions. We value their unique identity and characteristics and will ensure they are not disadvantaged or discriminated against in any way in respect of their cultural heritage, ethnicity, faith and beliefs, sexuality, disability or gender.

We value what our children and young people looked after and care leavers say about their lived experiences and will ensure they have the opportunity to shape and influence the parenting they receive.

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So, we want to:

- A. be confident as Corporate Parents that we know what it is like to be a child in the care of Shropshire Council;
- B. act as **Corporate Family** and engaging fully our partners in this role;
- C. provide opportunities to help our children and young people (for whom we have Corporate Parenting responsibilities) meet our Pledge.

Children in Care Council and Care Leavers' Forum

Shropshire's Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers' Forum seeks to represent and promote the views, opinions and experiences of Shropshire's children and young people looked after in order to influence the development of services provided by Shropshire Council and its partners. The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum brings together representatives of Shropshire's children and young people looked after and care leavers to share their views, opinions, ideas and experiences in order to improve services provided by Shropshire Council and its partners. The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum works in partnership with Shropshire's Corporate Parenting Steering Board, Shropshire Council and providers of services to develop and shape policies and proposals that affect Shropshire's children and young people looked after and care leavers.

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7.1 Aims and Objectives of the Strategy

Corporate Parenting operates at strategic, operational and individual levels. Its 3 key elements are:

A statutory duty detailed in the **Children and Social Work Act 2017** Corporate Parenting responsibilities and principles; the **Children Act 1989** to have regard for the welfare of the child as paramount and provision of services to support children to remain cared for families and to look after them when this is not possible; and the **Children and Young Persons Act 2008** for all parts of a local authority to co-operate in promoting the welfare of children and young people in care and a duty on other partners and agencies to cooperate in fulfilling that duty;

Co-ordinating the activities of the many different services, professionals and carers who are involved in a child or young person's life and taking a strategic, child-centred approach to the delivery of services;

Shifting the emphasis from 'corporate' to 'parenting' which means doing what a good parent would do to promote and support the physical, emotional, social and cognitive development of a child from infancy to adulthood.

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The objective of this Strategy is to ensure the Corporate Parenting responsibilities for all elected members and council employees are clearly outlined so that:

Elected members have a clear understanding and awareness of the needs of our children in care and care leavers and ensure their responsibilities as corporate parents are reflected in all aspects of the Council's work.

All services delivered by the Council play a part in delivering Corporate Parenting and continually monitoring and reviewing what their services contribute to improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

The Corporate Family activity leads to measurable improvement in the life chances of children in care and care leavers, so these are in line with their peers.

Communication between elected members and children in care and care leavers ensures they have a say in how decisions are made about services affecting them and are able to influence those decisions.

Partnership working and joint planning and commissioning is promoted as an effective means of delivering effective services.



7.2 Our Strategic Priorities

The 6 main priorities for the Corporate Parenting Steering Board:

1. Participation-Taking account of the voice of looked after children and young people
2. Progressing our children's and young people's aspirations
3. Promoting Health and Wellbeing
4. Revising the Care Leavers' Local Offer
5. Placement Stability
6. Promoting the education of looked after children

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1.Participation-Taking account of the voice of looked after children and young people

As Corporate Parents we are committed to listening to and taking account of the experiences, wishes and feelings of looked after children and care leavers.

We understand that they have first-hand experience of what it is like to be 'looked after' and that we have a duty to plan **with** them for services that will directly impact on them and their outcomes.

As part of our Corporate Parenting Strategy we have commissioned Mind of My Own to enable children and young people to have an independent means to express their views. Mind of My Own is available in a range of languages and is accessible to children who may have communication difficulties or additional needs.

We promote and support our Children in Care Council (CICC) and Care Leavers' Forum.

We have funded posts for a Care Leavers' Ambassador and Unaccompanied Asylum- Seeking Children Peer Ambassador.

We now have a Participation sub-group leading on developing and promoting the voice of our children and

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young people across the Council and with partners, not only to ensure we listen to them in respect of their own plans but also their direct input into the development of services that impact on them, including our development of our care leavers' hub and accommodation, new children's homes, training of foster carers and appointments of key staff.

2. Progressing our children's and young people's aspirations

We want every member of the Council and partners to have high aspirations for our children and young people and to ensure we have the right services and support to make them a reality. There are 3 main aspirations we have prioritized:

- Promoting Elected Members', employee and partner engagement

There is an Induction Programme in place for all Elected Members (**Appendix 2**). It is mandatory for elected members to take part in this Induction Programme as this enables each elected member to understand the context for looked after children and care leavers, their own role and the role of the Lead Member and the Corporate Parenting Steering Board and that of Council Officers and departments and partner agencies.

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There is a plan to start an Aspirations Fund for young people looked after and care leavers to enable them to fulfil their aspirations as they move into adulthood.

- Promoting education, employment and training opportunities

One of the most important contributions that Shropshire Council can collectively make to Corporate Parenting is how they, as the “family firm” can deliver better employability opportunities for children and young people in care and care leavers. “Employability” refers to a wide range of activities and includes apprenticeships, work experience, and work placements. These activities depend on cooperation and strategic and operational planning between Council services creating opportunities through further training and skills, apprenticeships and work experience, alongside the Job Centre and local businesses and colleges/the University.

- The Council will give additional support to care leavers and looked after young people age16+ to enable them to develop their CV and preparation for interview.
- Opportunities for work experience and apprenticeships within the Council and with partner agencies will be promoted.

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- The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will use the Aspirations sub-group to develop further opportunities in line with the wishes and views of looked after young people.

These opportunities are designed to:

- help young people meet their potential and achieve their abilities, hopes and aspirations;
- help them become confident individuals;
- give them a taste of the world of work;
- broaden their horizons from little or no experience of employment options;
- and help them become economically and socially positively contributing citizens.

The Council is also committed to ensuring that children and young people with additional or complex needs have the same access to the education, training and employment opportunities. The **SEND Local Offer** is widely promoted, alongside the development of closer transitioning arrangements to adulthood.

- Sign up to the Care Leavers' Covenant

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As corporate parents we wish to make a commitment to meet the requirements of the **Care Leavers' Covenant**. Over the next year the Council plans to build on the success of the event with local businesses and partners in November 2019, to promote this initiative.

Each department in the Local Authority will be looking at what it can pledge specifically to our care experienced young people. The Council can then officially pledge its offers of support available to care leavers through "MyCovenant" which will then be published on the MyCovenant App.

Shropshire has made good progress with its offer to care leavers and has published what it makes available, the care leavers covenant is in addition to the existing Care Leavers' Local Offer.

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3.Promoting Health and Wellbeing

The Council works with health partners to ensure the health needs of looked after children and care leavers are met. Health partners include the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), MPFT and Shropshire Community Hospital Trust.

- The Council will work in partnership with the CCG to oversee commissioning arrangements to promote and meet the health needs of looked after children and care leavers.
- The health needs of looked after children and care leavers is monitored and reported to the Corporate Parenting Steering Board by the Health sub-group and also to the CCG.
- The Designated Doctor and Designated Nurse for Looked After Children will take the lead for ensuring all looked after children have their health assessments completed in timescale and for the provision of a Health Passport to all care leavers at age 18.

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4.Revising the Care Leavers' Local Offer

The Council has a Care Leavers' Local Offer, published on the Council's website. This ensures all young people are aware of their entitlements as a care leaver from their corporate parents in respect of:

- Having an allocated Personal Advisor
- Having somewhere suitable to live
- Access and opportunities for education, training and employment
- Support to meet their health and emotional needs
- Support to access community, leisure and social activities
- Support to stay in contact with their family and friends

The Local Offer was co-produced with our young people and is due for review in 2021 in consultation with young people and other stakeholders.

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5.Placement Stability

Stability for children in care, where they are in an appropriate placement that meets their needs, is an important element in helping them to secure positive outcomes. To help support improved placement stability, the Children's Commissioner has developed a Stability Index to measures three aspects of children's experiences of care – placement moves, school moves, and changes in social worker.

6.Promoting the education of looked after children

This is overseen by the Virtual School. The Virtual School Head reports on progress and attainment of all looked after children.

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8. How the Strategy will be taken forward

As a partnership, we ensure children looked after and care experienced young people have a strong voice to support us in delivering our ambitions and in meeting their needs.

We recognise our Children in Care Council: Visions of Success as key to this, in addition to our wider population of children looked after and care experienced young people who can share their lived experiences with us and influence continuous service improvement.

As partners we will listen, hear what is being said and take action to improve the lives of this group of children and young people, we are also committed to feeding back to young people to ensure they know how their input has changed the way we support them.

8.1 Role of Elected Members

All elected members have to ensure that public services used or required by children and young people in care are of a high quality, integrated and take account of need. They must ensure they are fully informed of the issues facing children in care by understanding their characteristics and by knowing how well services are performing in meeting their assessed needs. This requires an awareness and understanding of:

- The voice of children and young people in planning services with them that are about them and for them;
- Care and placement arrangements.



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- Child protection and safety policies and procedures; Education performance and achievements in school; Further and Higher Education, training and employment achievements;
- Responsiveness of health services;
- Preparation for leaving care arrangements and housing need;
- Arrangements to prevent children in care from getting into trouble;

Elected members will be supported in meeting their responsibilities by relevant council officers. They will provide leadership that will encourage and support partnership and joined-up working. This will ensure that funding, commissioning and priority setting deliver the best combination of services for children and young people in care and care leavers.

The Lead Member for Children's Services and members on the Corporate Parenting Steering Board have a particular responsibility to ensure all members are aware of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the role of members to promote this.

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8.2 Role of Council Departments and partner agencies

All employees of the council are corporate parents and need to understand how their role can support and enhance the lives of the children and young people who are looked after by the Council and engage partners to also fulfil their duties to our children looked after and care leavers.

The Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive have specific responsibilities to have oversight of the needs of children looked after and care leavers, to ensure they are safely cared for and that there are sufficient resources to provide a safe, secure home throughout their childhood and beyond.

The Children and Safeguarding Service fulfills the Council's main duties to our children looked after and care leavers, but they cannot do this without a 'Whole Council' response.

These are the main underpinning Council strategies in place or in progress:

- The Council has a duty to ensure there are sufficient services to support children to have a 'secure base' in a safe, loving and caring home and sufficient places for

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looked after children and young people to live within the local authority where possible.

The **Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2025** sets out the Council's statutory responsibilities, the assessment of need and strategic planning in all these areas. (**Appendix 2**).

- The Council has invested in '**Stepping- Stones**' to support children to remain or return to their birth family or 'step down' from residential care to live with a foster family.
- The Council Housing Service has duty to prevent homelessness and ensure care leavers live in suitable accommodation. There is a **Joint Housing & Children's Services Protocol to Prevent Homelessness for 16/17s and Care Leavers**. The Council is investing in accommodation and a Care Leavers' Hub to aid transitions to adulthood for care leavers and provide them with a safe meeting space.
- There is a plan in place for the recruitment of foster carers and Supported Board and Lodgings providers to enable more Shropshire children and young people to be cared for locally and to meet their assessed needs in respect of disability, culture, ethnicity and language, religion and beliefs, sexuality and gender.

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- The Council supports the **Permanence Policy** set out in the Children's Services Manual. We will enable children to live within their family whenever this is possible and aim to ensure children have an alternative permanent home and a secure base when this is not possible. We will promote brothers and sisters remaining together where possible and to facilitate family contact where this meets their needs.
- For those few children who are not able or ready to live with a family there is planned investment by the Council to grow the in-house residential provision.
- **The Special Guardianship Support Policy** has recently been revised to enable more connected carers to offer a permanent home to the children in their care without the need for unnecessary state intrusion.
- The regional **Joint Adoption Service** has a priority to ensure there are sufficient adoptive families for children who are unable to live with their birth family and for whom adoption is the right plan for them.
- The Council has joined the voluntary **National Transfer Scheme** to enable unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) to be provided with a safe home by Shropshire Council and supported into adulthood. The



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Council uses the government grant available to ensure there is sufficient support and housing in a suitable location and environment to meet their needs. A UASC peer support ambassador, a former UASC experienced young person, is in post.

- **Our Care Leavers' Local Offer**

We are Corporate Parents to our young people who have been looked after by Shropshire Council and are eligible for ongoing advice, support and assistance from the age of 16 up to their 25th birthday if they request this.

The key elements of our Local Offer are:

- To maintain our Corporate Parenting Pledge
 - To prepare our young people for adult life, ensuring they have an up-to-date and relevant Pathway Plan
 - To offer support with their health, education, training and employment, safe and secure accommodation, managing money, enabling safe relationships and lifelong links
- **The Care Leavers' Covenant** is a government initiative borne out of Keep on Caring, the care leaver strategy 2016. It seeks to create practical, specific offers, by organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors, to support care leavers aged 16-25 in living independently.

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The 'mission' of the Covenant is to promote five key outcomes, in order that care leavers:

- are better prepared to live independently;
- have improved access to employment, education and training;
- experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure;
- have improved access to health support;
- achieve financial stability.

However, there is an overarching ambition at the heart of the Covenant: namely, for society – civic, civil and business – to be the lifelong 'universal family' to those who have not enjoyed the love and support that comes from having devoted birth parents to fall back on.

The DfE has set out five underpinning objectives which set out a vision for the Care Leaver Covenant:

- Care leavers aged 16-25 across England have access to a wide range of support and opportunities through the Covenant, wherever they live, to help them achieve the five outcomes.
- Local authorities and care leavers know and understand about the Covenant and what support care leavers can get from signatories.
- Personal Advisers, Independent Fostering Agencies, charities, and others working with care leavers and

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those about to become care leavers have the information they need about Covenant offers to help care leavers take advantage of the support offered.

- A wide range of businesses and charities across England sign up to make offers of support to care leavers that help them achieve the five outcomes.
- The Care Leaver Covenant is a recognised and valued brand, and the accepted framework, for designing and delivering exceptional interventions that enable care leavers to make a successful transition into independent living.

The local authority is committed to signing up to the Care Leavers' Covenant by the end of 2021 and revising our Care Leavers' Local Offer to reflect our support for our care experienced young people as they move into adulthood.

8.3 The Virtual School for Children in Care

The Virtual School is responsible for providing strategic direction and targeted support and securing successful educational outcomes for all children and young people in care and will:

- Support the Council in the governance and action plan for the Virtual School Governing Body

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- Support children and young people in care in School Years 1-13 which will include working with carers, Social Workers, Schools, Special Educational Needs, other Council teams and external agencies.
- Monitor performance of educational attainment and progress across all Key Stages and assist and support with the statutory completion of Personal Education Plans
- Facilitate Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings
- Advise, monitor and report on all matters regarding admissions, attendance and exclusions of children and young people in care. No looked after child should be permanently excluded without consultation with the Virtual School Head Teacher.
- Provide training for carers, designated teachers and designated governors.

And above all, promote and improve the educational attainment of children and young people in care.

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8.4 The Role of the Corporate Parenting Steering Board

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will act as an advisory and consultative body to the Council, its partners and its Committees and other strategic groups and will provide robust challenge to ensure that Corporate Parenting duties are carried out effectively and consistently. It will ensure that the outcomes and life chances of children in care and care leavers are improved so they are in line with their peers and will act as the champion for these children and young people.

It is the role of the Corporate Parenting Steering Board to set the priorities for children in care and to monitor and scrutinise service delivery. It will also:

- Ensure that the commitments outlined in the Shropshire's Charter for Children in Care and Care Leavers are delivered.
- Oversee the implementation of this strategy with delegated responsibilities to Heads of Service or Senior Managers within all Departments and partner agencies.
- Monitor the delivery of good, safe, high quality services through quality assurance and performance management frameworks.

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The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will provide:

- High Support and High Challenge to ensure effective undertaking of the Corporate Parenting Responsibility – holding to account on behalf of the council.
- Clear line of sight on practice and what good practice looks like and assure selves it is delivered, including the role of the IRO.
- Scrutiny and oversight of performance, outcomes and impact for children and young people of the work of the Local Authority and key partners.
- Lead the culture and share the message about Corporate Parenting responsibilities.
- Lead the narrative – these are our children, good enough parenting that would be good enough for our own children.

In addition to progressing the 6 Council priorities the Corporate Parenting Steering Group also has a responsibility to ensure children looked after and care leavers are safeguarded and that their progress is monitored so that early action can be taken when gaps are addressed and successes can be celebrated as we would for our own children.

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8.5 Ensuring safety

The Council works closely with the police, Community Safety Partnership, the Local Safeguarding Partnership and Youth Offending Service to reduce the risks for children and young people living in Shropshire and looked after away from Shropshire to ensure:

- Coordinated actions are taken to prevent the need for children to become looked after, and to enable them to live safely when they are looked after, or as care leavers, through making the local community and environment in which they live safe from criminal or sexual exploitation.
- Coordinated actions are taken to identify children at risk of harm, including those who go missing from care or are at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation, and ensure plans are in place to protect them.
- Coordinated actions are taken to enable looked after children to feel safe and be safe with the people caring for them and in their local community and environment.



8.6 Oversight and Scrutiny

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will receive and scrutinize the following reports at each Board:

- Sub-group progress reports inc. data in respect of education, health, and stability indicators

The Board will also receive Annual Reports:

- IRO Annual Report
- Adoption Annual Report
- Fostering Annual Report
- Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Annual Report
- Independent Advocacy Annual Report
- Virtual School Annual Report

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8. Participation

As corporate parents, Shropshire is committed to ensuring all children looked after and young people whom we are working with, have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them.

Their views will be given due weight according to the age and maturity of the child or young person and this will be a process, not a one-fit all approach, but one based on the voice of children and younger people, who have a fundamental right to be heard.

We understand that by meaningful participation, this will enable children and young people to have an influence on their own outcomes.

As corporate parents we are fully committed to meaningful participation by parent carers, children and young people to understand their needs, experiences and views to influence practice, service and policy changes.

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We will take an interest in their successes and problems and celebrate their achievements by;

- ✓ Communicating in the best way possible
- ✓ Listening and taking seriously the views of children and young people
- ✓ Use plain language that is easily understood
- ✓ Keep in touch regularly
- ✓ Support children and young people in achieving their goals
- ✓ Putting children and the heart of our plans and practice
- ✓ Hold specific workshops and events through virtual platforms and face to face engagement, where safe to do so.
- ✓ Every contact will count, through our assessment and review work, supporting young people and children.



10.Going Forward

Through 2020 plans were delayed in some areas due to the impact of Covid-19. We are keen to make up for lost time in 2022 onwards.

We have reviewed and revised the Corporate Parenting Steering Board (**Appendix 1**) to encompass all areas where we need oversight and strategic engagement to ensure the needs of our looked after children and care leavers are understood, how we are meeting those needs, celebrating successes of our children and young people and embedding best practice and knowing where gaps exist, and planning for how we address them.

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board sub-groups have begun this work and a full review of progress and gaps will be undertaken from September 2021-March 2022 to inform a Corporate Parenting Action Plan for 2022-2023.



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Appendices

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Appendix 1

Corporate Parenting Steering Board



ITEM 4 - Corporate
Parenting Steering



Corporate
Parenting Sub Group

Requirements

The leadership and governance of the Corporate Parenting Steering Board must be clear in relation to the Steering Group's power to deploy resources and hold officers to account.

Individual Steering Board members must be trained and prepared for their task, and be clear about the authority they carry.

The relationship of the Corporate Parenting Steering Board to other Boards, partnership arrangements and scrutiny committees must be clear.

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board must have access to robust qualitative and quantitative management information in order to effectively monitor performance against outcomes and track delivery of Pledge commitments.

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will, therefore, receive reports from the sub-groups and officers on a range of local and national performance indicators in relation to children in care e.g. health, education, participation, and inspection outcomes.

Steering Board Membership

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will be chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People, and will meet quarterly

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Membership will consist of Councillors, Director of Children Services, Assistant Director Children Services, Senior Officers, representatives for Children and Young People in and leaving care, and partner agencies such as Health and Police.

The engagement of young people with the Steering Board, on their terms, will be essential to inform current and future priorities and decisions relating to children in care.

Terms of Reference:

- Provide a forum for Children in Care to influence policy, service developments, practice, etc. so that there is continuous improvement;
- Take a strategic overview of Shropshire Council's and partner agencies responsibilities towards Children in Care;
- Scrutinise service delivery in order to satisfy ourselves that there is joined up, effective and holistic approach to meeting the needs of looked after children and care leavers.
- Commit to listen to the views of looked after children, young people and care leavers.
- Ensure looked after children, young people and care leavers are considered in the development of all policy and service provision that might impact on them.
- Attend events that recognize and celebrate the achievements and successes of looked after children, young people and care leavers.
- Meet with children and young people through participation groups
- Ensure that relevant new initiatives, plans, policies and service developments are presented to the Panel for consultation.
- Challenge practice and ways of working and the delivery of services where required
- Understand the needs of Shropshire's looked after population, including data relating to;
 - How many looked after children, young people and care leavers there are

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- How many the local authority is looking after
- How well we are achieving permanency for children in a timely way
- How well looked after children, young people and care leavers are doing at school, college or university and what needs to be done to improve educational outcomes
- What the health needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers are and how these are being met
- What advocacy or children's services are available
- What are the housing needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers and how are these being met?
- What support is available to care leavers

Support to the Corporate Parenting Steering Board: will be provided by the PA to the Head of Service

Accountability: Chair to report to the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive or DCS

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee: will be represented on the board by elected members. Board will receive relevant reports and Recommendations for information, planning and monitoring purposes.

Relationship with the Safeguarding Patnership: The work programme of the Corporate Parenting Board and reports should be provided to the Safeguarding Partnership– Reports are for information only

Appendix 2

Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2025



2020-2025
Sufficiency Strategy

Appendix 3

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Corporate Parenting Councillors' Induction Programme 2021

A programme has been revised in 2021 to enable every Councillor to understand the context for looked after children and care leavers, and the role of councillors to fulfil their statutory duties



Elected Member
Induction Programme



Shropshire
Councillors' Induction Programme

Appendix 4

Key Structures/posts

- **Lead Member for Children's Services.** This individual has *political* responsibility for the leadership, strategy and effectiveness of local authority children's services.
- **Director of Children's Services.** This person has *professional* responsibility for the leadership, strategy and effectiveness of local authority children's services.
- **Independent Reviewing Officers.** IROs are responsible for reviewing and monitoring each looked after child's case and care plan and challenging poor practice. They must be qualified social workers and independent from the line management of the child's case.
- **Social Workers.** Each looked after child must have a qualified social worker allocated to them, responsible for developing and implementing their care plan.
- **Residential and foster carers.** Each looked after child should be provided with a placement to live in that is best able to keep them safe and meet their needs. This can be with foster carers, in residential care or a more specialist setting if their needs are complex.



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- **Kinship carers.** Some looked after children are placed with family or friends, sometimes known as 'kinship carers' or **Connected Person Carers**.
- **Adopters.** Where it is decided that a child cannot be cared for by their own family, it is important that a permanent alternative home is provided. This may be through adoption, where the adoptive family acquires full parental responsibility and the child ceases to be looked after once an adoption order is made.
- **Special guardians.** Where a child has significant ties with someone other than a parent who is looking after them, such as a relative or foster carer, that person can be given parental responsibility through a special guardianship order. This means that they will bring the child up, and the child is no longer looked after, but the child is not part of their family in the same way as an adopted child.
- **Independent visitors.** Every looked after child is entitled to have an independent visitor – an adult completely outside the care system who can befriend them. This is especially useful for children who have little or no contact with their family.
- **Advocates.** An advocate has a more specific role than that of an independent visitor, in that they support the child's participation in decision-making and make sure that their voice is heard. They may accompany children to review meetings if the child requests it.
- **Personal advisors.** Young people entitled to services as a care-leaver must be allocated a personal advisor to act as a focal point for planning their transition to adulthood. The role is not the same as that of a social worker and personal advisors will continue to offer support after the young person has left care.
- **Children in Care Council.** Local authorities are required to establish a Children in Care Council to represent the views of looked after children to those responsible for the service.
- **Participation workers.** Many local authorities have created specific posts, or contracted local voluntary sector partners, to support children's participation in the Children in Care Council or to seek their views in other ways.



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- **Corporate parenting group/panel.** Although not a statutory requirement, most local authorities have established a group of elected members to oversee the corporate parenting function of the local authority.
- **Children's Trusts.** These are partnership arrangements bringing together children's services within a local authority area. They are no longer mandatory but, if not established, alternative mechanisms to work in partnership need to be in place.
- **Health and well-being boards.** A forum for key leaders from the health and social care system to work together to improve the health and well-being of the local population and reduce health inequalities. As a group at risk of poor health, it will be important to ensure that the needs of looked after children and care-leavers form part of their remit. It will also be important to clarify links with the Children's Trust or other bodies responsible for children's services.
- **Virtual school head.** The Children and Families Act 2014 made it a statutory duty for all English Local Authorities to appoint a SENIOR OFFICER (Virtual Head Teacher) with the responsibility and purpose of promoting the educational attainments of looked after children. This will involve working with a range of partners including schools, social workers, carers, members and senior local authority officers to strategically and operationally promote the educational opportunities and attainments for looked after children in Shropshire. The virtual school head or equivalent will collate information about the attainment of looked after children as if they were in a single school, and to provide challenge and support to help them make progress.
- **Designated teachers.** Every maintained school is required to appoint a designated teacher to promote the educational achievement of looked after children.
- **Designated doctors and nurses for looked after children.** These individuals have a strategic role that is separate from the direct service they may offer to individual children. Different local areas operate different models but it is important that, whichever model is used, arrangements are in place to enable the designated professionals to



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have an impact on the commissioning of health services for looked after children.

- **Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).** Dedicated provision is required for looked after children. In some authorities this has led to the creation of specialist teams; in others it has been interpreted more narrowly.
- **Clinical Commissioning Groups.** These bodies and the local authority should agree joint action on the health needs of looked after children in their area and develop a joint commissioning strategy.
- **The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP).** This is not mandatory but can serve to describe the aspirations for all children in an area. If the local authority has such a plan, it is useful to ensure that looked after children are identified as a group requiring specific services.
- **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.** The JSNA is the process for identifying the current and future health and well-being needs of a local population, leading to agreed commissioning priorities that will improve outcomes and reduce health inequalities.
- **Director of Public Health.** The Director should be examining the health outcomes of looked after children to ensure that steps are taken to reduce inequalities.