



West Dunbartonshire Council

**West Dunbartonshire
Corporate Parenting Strategy**

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1. Introduction

West Dunbartonshire Council is committed to improving the life outcomes of every Looked After Child and Young Person in it's care.

This strategy sets out West Dunbartonshire Council's responsibility as a corporate parent, with specific regard to our looked after children and young people, making sure that support is available to help them reach their full potential and have the same opportunities and advantages as children who are not looked after.

The overall aim of the strategy is to articulate the corporate responsibility of the whole council, through a commitment to new and established programmes and initiatives which reflect National and local policies and best practice. The strategy requires the active engagement of all service departments of West Dunbartonshire Council, and of elected members.

2. Background

Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe;

“the formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children and young people.”

Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better (2007)

Effective corporate parenting will require a commitment from all council employees, elected members and partner agencies and is an authority wide approach. All elected members and senior officers of the West Dunbartonshire Council have a key strategic role to play as members of the corporate family and they should be supported by all other members of the corporate family.

Corporate parenting responsibility does not lie solely with those services that work directly with looked after children and young people, but requires all departments to work together in order to achieve the best outcomes for looked after children and young people within West Dunbartonshire.

This responsibility for Looked After Children is laid out in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and is further reiterated in *Getting it Right for Every Child (2005)*, *Extraordinary Lives (2006)*, *Looked After Children & Young People: We Can and Must Do Better*, Scottish Executive (2007), *These Are Our Bairns*, Scottish Government (2008), *Core Tasks for Designated Managers*, Scottish Government

(2008) (new Plan 2009-2012?and West Dunbartonshire Council's *Integrated Children's Services Plan 2005-2008*. These guidelines are vital in ensuring that their Council acts as an effective corporate parent for every looked after child and young person, actively supporting standards of care and seeking high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their child.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

The Scottish Government has recognised the need to give children the best start in life, improving their chances to reach their full potential later in life. GIRFEC is a national programme that promotes a shared approach to supporting children's needs for practitioners across services. It encourages partnership between families and services in order to meet the needs and promote the well-being and potential of all children.

Well-being can be described by using the 8 indicators listed below.

- **Safe:** protected from abuse, neglect or harm at home, at school and in the community.
- **Healthy:** having the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, access to suitable healthcare, and support in learning to make healthy and safe choices.
- **Achieving:** being supported and guided in their learning and in the development of their skills, confidence and self-esteem at home, at school, and in the community.
- **Nurtured:** having a nurturing place to live, in a family setting with additional help if needed or, where this is not possible, in a suitable care setting.
- **Active:** having opportunities to take part in activities such as play, recreation and sport which contribute to healthy growth and development, both at home and in the community.
- **Respected:** having the opportunity, along with carers, to be heard and involved in decisions which affect them.
- **Responsible:** having opportunities and encouragement to play active and responsible roles in their schools and communities and where necessary, having appropriate guidance and supervision and being involved in decisions that affect them.
- **Included:** having help to overcome social, educational, physical and economic inequalities and being accepted as part of the community in which they live and learn.

Scottish Government Vision

“Councils and their community planning partners will fully understand and accept their responsibilities as corporate parents and governance arrangements will be in place to make sure that work within councils and their partner organisations is child-centred and focused on achieving the overarching outcome”

These Are Our Bairns (2008)

3. Looked After Children and Young People

The Children (Scotland) Act, 1995 defines ‘children’ as anyone under the age of 18. The term ‘looked after’ was introduced by the government in the Children (Scotland) Act, 1995 and is used to describe a child or young person for whom the local authority has a statutory and/or parental responsibility.

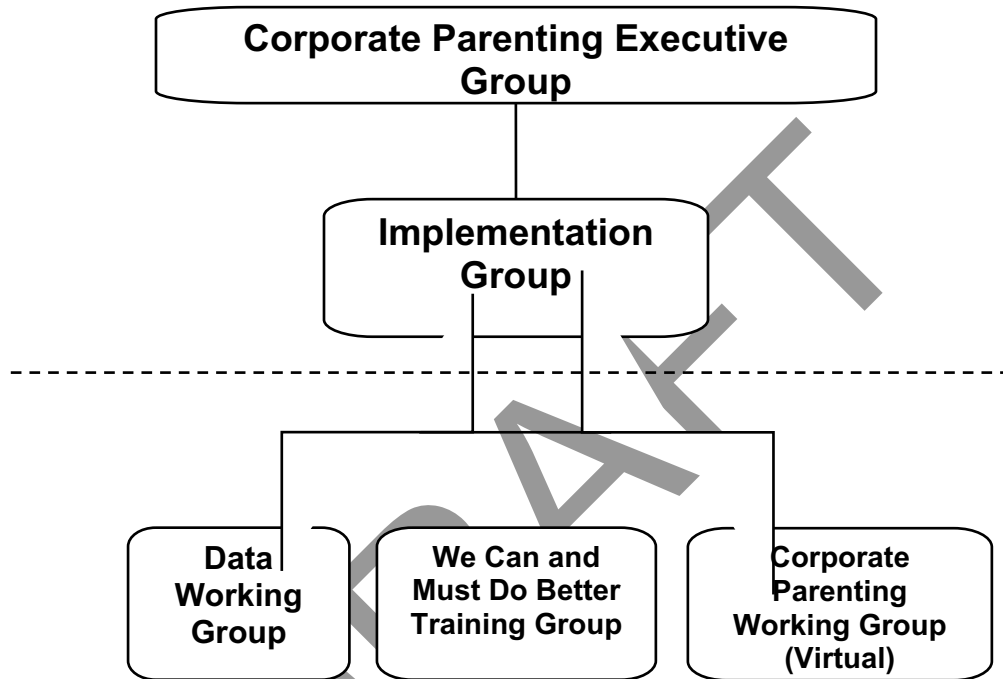
Looked After children and young people include children who are subject to a supervision order and live at home with family members as well as children who live with foster or kinship carers, in residential schools or care homes or in secure care and in the authority, range from new born infants to young people in their late teens being supported in becoming more independent and leaving care.

4. The Picture in West Dunbartonshire

Accommodation Type/Age	0-1	1-4	5-11	12-15	16-17	18	19-21	Total
At home with parents	0	28	68	75	12	0	0	183
With friends/relatives	1	23	32	6	1	0	0	63
With foster carers provided by Local Authority	4	11	30	20	4	0	0	69
With foster carers purchased by Local Authority	0	0	9	2	0	0	0	11
With prospective adopters	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
In other community	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
In Local Authority home	0	0	0	13	6	0	0	19
In voluntary school	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
In residential home	0	0	2	15	2	0	0	19
In secure accommodation	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	5
Other residential	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	5
Total	5	62	142	139	29	0	0	377

5. Developing and Implementing the Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Corporate Parenting Executive Group and a number of working groups were created to develop a strategic vision and the operational support to realise that vision. Each department within the Council is represented on the Corporate Parenting Executive Group and the multi agency make up of the working groups ensure corporate commitment.



Corporate Parenting Executive Group

This group is chaired by the Chief Executive and membership of the group is made up of senior council officers and elected members and its aim is to monitor the creation and implementation of the Corporate Parenting strategy.

Implementation Group

This group consists of council officers and representatives from ? who are directly involved in the daily lives of looked after children and young people

Data Working Group

This group was created to deal with the accurate recording and monitoring of all records relating to looked after children and young people in West Dunbartonshire.

We Can and Must Do Better Training Group

This group is responsible for developing and implementing a training programme based on the DVD produced by the Scottish Government. The group will also be responsible for evaluating the roll out of the programme within each of the services involved.

Corporate Parenting Working Group (Virtual)

This group is a fluid group and will be led by the Corporate Parenting Implementation Officer who will meet with the members of the Corporate Family who are not regular members of the other groups. This is not a set membership and has met as required.

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6. Strategy: Aims and Outcomes

Aims

This strategy aims to improve the life outcomes of all of West Dunbartonshire's looked after children and young people through the use of a holistic approach to delivery of services.

In order to achieve this we will:

- Provide our young people with the high quality care and the support all young people are entitled to, appropriate to their individual needs
- Be ambitious for our young people and encourage them in their efforts to reach their full potential.
- Support our young people to gain and support them in sustaining education, employment or training post 16 years
- Ensure our young people are supported to access appropriate health services
- Ensure our young people are supported to access universal services, including leisure and cultural services
- Recognise and celebrate the achievements of our young people
- Ensure that there are regular consultations with young people and they are encouraged to participate in developing policies and strategies that directly affect them.
- Ensure that support is available to all young people leaving care

Outcomes

This strategy will support those working to provide better outcomes for our looked after children. The outcomes of our strategy will be as follows:

- All elected members and senior officers of the Council will recognise and fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities
- Council policies and strategies will reflect the needs of our looked after children and young people
- The life chances of our looked after children and young people will be improved as a result of our commitment to corporate parenting~

- Our looked after children and young people will become
 - Confident Individuals
 - Effective Contributors
 - Responsible Citizens
 - Successful Learners
- Our looked after children and young people will develop skills for learning, life and work and achieve sustained positive destinations
- Our looked after children and young people will actively enjoy a wide range of cultural, social and leisure pursuits and activities
- The health and well being of our looked after children and young people will be similar to other children and young people within West Dunbartonshire
- Our looked after children and young people will feel that they have been consulted and have influenced services and decisions which affect them

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7. Roles and Responsibilities

Elected Members

As Corporate Parents, Elected Members take responsibility for promoting the highest standards of care for looked after children and young people. They actively seek high quality outcomes for looked after children and young people. There should be a clear understanding by elected members of their role as corporate parents. They should be supported in discharging this role and should have available, the necessary information to ask key questions regarding the care, education, health and wider opportunities of our looked after children and young people.

In order for our elected members to be fully aware of the opinions of our looked after children and young people, there should be a vehicle for dialogue between elected members and the children in their care so that issues can be raised and resolved.

Chief Executive and Corporate Parenting Executive Group

The Chief Executive has an important leadership role in ensuring the delivery of our Corporate Parenting Strategy. The effectiveness of our corporate parenting will be scrutinised by The Corporate Parenting Executive Group. We should be aiming for a level of excellence that allows us to provide an environment in which our looked after children can reach their full potential.

The Corporate Parenting Executive Group should ensure that there are mechanisms in place to monitor and report on the progress of our looked after children and young people and ensure that resources are available to help us fulfil our duties as corporate parents.

Social Work and Health

The Department of Social Work and Health has responsibility for supporting vulnerable groups of people across the Council.

Responsibility for Looked After Children is carried out by Children and Families Services through area based team services in Clydebank and Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven. A centralised Child Care Team also supports the needs of Looked After Children. These services have the main responsibilities to ensure that the Local Authority fulfils its legislative duties towards Looked After Children, with the support of partners within and outwith the authority.

This collaborative approach is essential given the needs of Looked After Children can be diverse and complex, requiring supports that are timely, targeted and co-ordinated. Children and Families Services will have prime responsibility for ensuring that all Looked

After Children have a comprehensive assessment and individualised careplan which sets out the particular needs of children and allocates responsibility for fulfilling these needs within a reasonable timeframe. All Looked After Children will have an allocated worker who will have responsibility for co-ordinating this process.

All Looked After Children will be subject to statutory reviews as required by the Looked After Children Regulations. The frequency of reviews will vary, but the statutory minimum is six weeks after the child becomes Looked After and six monthly thereafter. In West Dunbartonshire these reviews normally take place on a three monthly basis, as this timescale better meets the evolving and changing needs of this vulnerable group.

Children and Families Services will take lead responsibility for calling and co-ordinating Looked After Children reviews.

Throughcare and Aftercare

When a young person ceases to be Looked After, past 16 years old, their support needs should be identified in Pathway Plan, which the young person has been involved in developing.

The nature of this plan will require the involvement of a number of other agencies and partners within and outwith the Council.

The Pathway Plan covers areas like:

Continue at school or not; further education or training; employment; health; accommodation; personal, social and life skills.

This group of young people are a priority group for our More Choices, More Chances Strategy and reviews for these young people should ensure that they are linked in to the range of options that are available under this strategy.

Education Services

Education is a fundamental entitlement, and often the key to other life outcomes. It is a universal service which must provide targeted support for vulnerable children and young people. A positive experience of education and the development of skills for learning, life and work can influence future success, engagement with society, health and well being.

All staff in education services have an important role as corporate parents. They also have unique opportunities to support and guide children and young people through everyday interactions and relationships established over time. For some looked after children and young people, their time in nursery or school may be when they feel most supported, safe and valued.

To carry out their role as corporate parents successfully education staff need to understand the needs and experiences of looked after children and to work in partnership with others to provide timely, effective and proportionate interventions. Expectations must be high but support must take account of individual additional support needs making reasonable adjustments as appropriate.

All schools and nurseries have a designated senior manager with specific responsibility for looked after children and young people. Their responsibility is to support and guide staff, and to make links with the wider multi agency network. Effective communication and information sharing, within the agreed confidentiality framework, lead to better outcomes.

Education staff also have a role in supporting children and young people to engage in cultural, social and leisure activities within the community. These wider experiences and opportunities for achievement can promote confidence and increase self esteem.

Children and young people who are looked after will have a range of experiences of family life and relationships. Developing links between education and parents or carers can often alleviate worries for children and remove barriers to successful engagement in learning.

Educational services and schools have a responsibility to monitor, track and record the progress, achievement and engagement of children and young people who are looked after and to ensure appropriate targeting of resources to meet individual needs.

Encouraging all young people to stay in learning post-16 is the best way of ensuring their long-term employability and contribution to society. 16+ Learning Choices is the model for supporting this within Curriculum for Excellence. West Dunbartonshire Council is a pilot authority for 16+ Learning Choices, which is a vehicle for transition from compulsory education into post 16 learning.

West Dunbartonshire Council is working with the Scottish Government and our partners to ensure that every young person has an appropriate learning offer made to them, well before they reach school leaving age.

For our young people to have a successful post 16 learning experience:

- The right learning provision must be in place
- The right financial support must be available to ensure that young people make choices based on the most appropriate learning for them
- The right information, advice and guidance must be available to make sure that young people know what opportunities are on offer

Skills Development Scotland, Careers work closely with our schools and colleagues who work with young people to ensure that those young people nearing school leaving age have access to appropriate and relevant information, advice and guidance on how to take the next step after leaving school.

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Health Services

Due to disruption in their lives, many of our looked after children and young people are less likely to engage with health services and as a consequence have much poorer health than their peers. While looked after children and young people do not access universal services such as GPs, dentists etc, as much as their peers, they often have a greater need than their peers for help from specialist services, *The Action Framework for Children and Young People* (Scottish Executive 2007) stated that 40% of children in care will have mental or emotional health problems. In West Dunbartonshire, the role of the LAAC Nurse is important in ensuring that our children and young people, who are looked after away from home, are supported in accessing all local health services.

Appropriate tracking and referral protocols and effective communication channels between agencies is fundamental, to ensure that children do not fall through the net.

Improving the health of looked after children and young people is one of our highest priorities and includes meeting the mental health needs as much as the emotional and physical health of looked after children and young people. The health of some looked after children and young people may have been poor before entering the care system and we therefore have an obligation to improve the health outcomes for all of our looked after children and young people.

Housing

Our environment and where we live has an impact on all aspects of our lives and looked after young people are no different.

All staff within Housing should be aware of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities and ensure these are considered when housing supports are put in place for looked after children and their families.

Where there is an issue of anti-social behaviour within a family, care should be taken to find out if children in the family are on supervision orders and work with colleagues from other departments to have appropriate supports in place. When a looked after young person becomes involved in anti-social behaviour, services should be aware of this and work together to support the individual.

For some care leavers, the transition from being looked after in care to independent living is a huge step in a young person's life and can be a major factor in how successful that young person will be in life and it is the Council's responsibility to make sure the accommodation secured meets the needs of the young person.

Because living independently is far more than just having somewhere to stay, it is important that we provide our young people with the necessary skills to cope with independent living and the support needed to sustain the place and Housing should work closely with our Throughcare service to ensure the care leaver has the support network available to help sustain a tenancy or placement.

Leisure and Cultural Services

Looked after children and young people often suffer from low self esteem and getting involved in leisure or cultural activities can be a way of making our young people more confident individuals. Access to many of the activities we control can be difficult for looked after children and young people because of factors such as cost, a feeling of being excluded and not having any sort of experience of being part of these activities previously. As corporate parents we have these facilities at our disposal and have the ability to include our young people in the activities available. We should promote our leisure and cultural services and encourage our young people to participate by making the activities accessible.

West Dunbartonshire Council's **Passport to Leisure** scheme provides all children with free access to swimming in council facilities and a reduction in fees for gyms etc. As corporate parents, we should ensure that our looked after children and young people and their families are supported to access these services and take part in this scheme

Independent Organisations

Providers within the independent sector are an important part of the corporate family. Effective communication between the council, as the referring authority, and the provider is all important and so we must look to build and maintain robust and regular reporting procedures.

To meet the educational needs of our looked after children, each independent provider should have a designated manager who will have responsibility for overseeing the progress of the children as recommended in ***Core Tasks for Designated Managers***.

Youth Justice System

The links of communication between the authority and the police is important in ensuring that there is an awareness of what it means to be looked after and the status of those within the authority who are looked after. We will invite a representative of the police force to meet with the Corporate Parenting working group to make sure we have an avenue for communication in order to work quickly when a looked after child or young person becomes involved in some sort of offending or anti-social behaviour.

Any community initiatives run by the police should include looked after children and young people and we should strive to make this a vehicle for our young people engaging positively with the police.

Sometimes restorative practice may be the best option for dealing with offending behaviour and the police should link with the Restorative Justice Co-ordinator to look at an approach which will best meet the needs of those involved.

Children's Hearing System

Most of the looked after children and young people in West Dunbartonshire have been subject to a decision made at a children's panel. In order to give our young people the best support possible when they are part of the children's hearing system we should ensure that those involved have access to training and information which will provide them with the information they need to understand what it is to be a looked after child.

We should also ensure that those who will attend children's hearings on behalf of the child have the most up to date information available so that the children's panel is able to make a decision which will be of most benefit to the child.

The children and young people who are the subject of any hearings should be given as much support as possible as this can be a confusing and frightening experience.

Any actions or procedures put in place by the hearing system should be followed in a way that will cause the least amount of disruption to the child or young person involved.

Finance

While officers working in finance may not have direct contact with looked after children and young people, they will be part of processes and decisions which directly affect those children.

While there is a need for best value the needs of the child or young person must be at the forefront of any decisions made and it is crucial that careful planning has taken place before a service is purchased or redesigned on cost grounds and that the service is reviewed regularly to ensure the needs of the child are being met.

Human Resources

As the largest employer in the area, West Dunbartonshire Council has the potential to offer appropriate employment, placement and training opportunities to some looked after young people who are making the move into employment and Human Resources would play a crucial role in this process in providing the opportunities and support for the young people and those who work with the young people.

8. Next Steps

- Launch of our Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Each department within the Council will develop an action plan to ensure all staff are aware of their responsibilities as corporate parents
- Regular reports on how the Council is fulfilling its role as corporate parent will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Executive Group
- An annual report on how the Council is fulfilling its role as corporate parent will be presented to full Council.
- Ongoing training and support will be given to all Council staff
- An annual consultation will take place with our looked after children and young people regarding their views on how well the Council fulfils its role as a corporate parent
- The strategy will be reviewed every 3 years and updated as required
- Consultation will take place with Community Planning Partners to develop the Strategy beyond the Council.

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Frequently Asked Questions

What does the term “looked after” mean?

The majority of children and young people who are considered to be **looked after** will come into one of the following two categories.

Looked After at home, where the child or young person is subject to a **supervision requirement with no condition of residence** through the Children’s Hearing system. The child or young person continues to live in their normal place of residence (i.e. often the family home).

Looked After away from home (i.e. away from their *normal* place of residence), where the child or young person is subject to a **supervision requirement with a condition of residence** through the Children’s Hearing system, or is provided with accommodation under section 25 (voluntary agreement) or is the subject of a Parental Responsibility Order (section 86). The child or young person is cared for away from their normal place of residence, e.g. in a foster care placement, residential/children’s unit, a residential school, a secure unit or a kinship placement.

What is a Corporate Parent

Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe;

“the formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children and young people.”

If you work for the local authority or for a partner agency who has offers some service which will have an impact on the life of looked after children and young people, you are a corporate parent

Who has the primary responsibility for looked after children and young people?

While social workers and educationalists tend to be the front line workers who have the most contact with looked after children and young people, the local authority has a ‘corporate responsibility’ for looked after children and young people and this places requirements on a range of agencies within a council, e.g. education, social work, housing, legal services, HR, to collaborate and co-ordinate support arrangements. Local authorities have particular statutory responsibilities in relation to looked after children and young people, normally discharged by social workers, to carry out assessments, prepare a care plan and conduct reviews.

Glossary

Adoption

Adoption is a legal process which replaces a child's birth parents with new adoptive parents. Children who are adopted will almost always have been looked after children, except where a step-parent adopts the child(ren) of their partner or in the case of intercountry adoptions from outside the United Kingdom.

Aftercare

The local authorities' duty to provide advice, guidance and assistance for young people who have ceased to be looked after, who are over school age.

Children's Unit/Home

A place of residence set up and managed by a local authority for young people who are on a supervision order with a condition of residence. Most young people who live in a residential establishment will have been assessed as needing to be cared for outwith their family home and are placed in residential care by the local authority, usually after a children's hearing.

Corporate Parent

The formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children and young people and care leavers.

Curriculum for Excellence

Curriculum for Excellence sets out the Scottish Government's vision for transforming Scottish education by 2007. It seeks to establish the values, purposes and principles of education in Scotland for children between the ages of 3 and 18.

Fostering

Fostering is currently defined (in the 1996 Fostering Regulations) as 'arranging for a child to live as a member of the family of a person who is not a parent and does not have parental responsibilities for the child'.

Kinship Care

Children who cannot live with or be cared for by a parent and who are living with a relative or family friend who is responsible for their upbringing (Tapsfield 2003).

Residential School

A school which is responsible for the care of young people as well as educating them.

Secure Care

Secure care provides a safe and secure environment for young people who require care for their own safety and for those who present a risk to others.