

City of London

Corporate Parenting Strategy

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1 Introduction

“You have no greater responsibility than when you are acting as corporate parents.”

Edward Timpson
(Minister for Children and Families – June 2013)

- 1.1 The City of London Corporation (the City) wants the children in and leaving its care to meet their full potential and have lives in which they thrive. As a corporate parent we will keep our children safe, and support, encourage and nurture them so that they reach the heights we all aspire to for our own children.
- 1.2 Corporate parenting is when the local authority takes on the role of a good parent to the children that it looks after and those who have left care and who are starting their independent adult life. As a corporate parent the City has a moral and legal duty to provide the kind of support that any good parent would provide for their own children. We know we cannot replace or replicate all aspects of parental love, but we can share the same personal concern, desire to support fulfilment and aspirations for the lives of the children in our care.
- 1.3 Our commitment to this role is set out in this strategy. It sets out our “Pledge” to the children in our care, and the expectation they can have of us as corporate parents. In doing so it challenges us as corporate parents to ensure that we act to continuously improve the life chances of our children looked after, young people, care leavers and unaccompanied asylum seeking children. It builds on the work that has already been progressed in order to drive, support and strengthen it further, and it places corporate parenting as a responsibility that sits across all of the City’s elected Members, departments and officers and our partner agencies.

2 Context

- 2.1 The outcomes for children in care can often be worse than those of their peers. Our children will have come into care having faced difficulties and disruption in their lives and many continue to face a number of challenges. Nationally, the educational, physical and psychological wellbeing, training and employment outcomes for children and young people looked after tend to be poorer compared with their non-looked after peers. However, as with all children, their experiences are individual, their response to those experiences is their own and their needs are distinct.
- 2.2 The City has a duty under the Children Act 1989 to “safeguard and promote” the welfare of each child we look after. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 extended the

responsibility of local authorities to young people leaving care, requiring them to plan the young person's transition to adulthood and provide ongoing advice and assistance until at least the age of 21. The Children Act 2004 introduced a duty on named agencies both to cooperate with the local authority and to ensure that they take account of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in fulfilling their own functions.

- 2.3 The success and impact of these duties can only be measured through the positive difference we make to the safety, health and wellbeing, educational attainment and transition to adulthood of children and young people. To ensure that we focus on and deliver this positive difference, and that there is a clear line of accountability for its delivery, the City has a lead Member for children's services to provide the political leadership, and a Director of children's services to provide professional leadership.
- 2.4 This leadership operates in an authority that is unique. Our size is such that we can develop a very close relationship with, and in-depth knowledge of, our children and young people. No child looked after or care leaver will contact the City and not be known to a professional in the team. This creates a relationship with our children and young people that is personal, and offers stability and security.
- 2.5 As corporate parent to a small and diverse number of children and young people, the City does not, and would not, offer uniform services based on standardised approaches. We are flexible and creative in our approach – tailoring our support and care to the needs of the individual.
- 2.6 The geography of the City and its role as the world's leading international finance centre mean that there are no opportunities to place children into care within our boundaries. This places an even greater responsibility on us to ensure that our children are connected and feel attachment to the City. This focuses not only on our children knowing our workers and Members, but also on helping them to discover our history and the opportunities the City can offer.

3 Our children who are looked after and leaving care – some characteristics

- 3.1 During 2013/14 the City looked after 11 children and supported 13 care leavers.
- 3.2 The ethnicity of the children we look after is diverse – and differs from the ethnicity of our local population as many of our children who have come into care have sought asylum in the United Kingdom.
- 3.3 The children we looked after during 2013/14 included three under the age of ten years, eight aged between ten and 18 years of age. Only one of our looked after children was female.

- 3.4 Periods of care range from very short emergency placements to care of more than five years. Four children were looked after for less than one year – all of whom came into care during the year and either left care or no longer required care during that same year. Five children had been looked after for between one and three years, and two for more than five years.
- 3.5 Of our seven children who had been looked after for more than a year during 2013/14, three had had a single placement, two transitioned at the age of 17 from foster care to semi-independent living during the year, one had experienced a change of placement (but had been stable in their current placement for two years), and a further child had changed placement during the year.
- 3.6 All looked after children were placed into foster care other than the two who moved into semi-independent supported accommodation from foster care. All our children looked after are placed within 12 miles/19.5 kilometres of the City. All are placed with Independent Fostering Agencies as the City does not have its own fostering service.
- 3.7 Five of our children aged 4–16, who had been in care continuously for a year or more, completed “Strengths & Difficulties” questionnaires during quarter four. All were well within the normal score range of 13 or below, with an average score of 4.8.
- 3.8 There have been no school exclusions among our children looked after. Our children generally performed well in school and college with most maintaining an attendance rate well above 90%. Our children are on track to meet national attainment levels for their age and we have also provided significant support to those for whom English is not a first language.
- 3.9 None of the children we look after have had engagement with the police or criminal justice system, and none were identified as having a substance misuse problem.
- 3.10 The City supported 13 care leavers over the course of 2013/14 aged from 18 to 22 years. Like our children looked after, the diverse ethnicity of our care leavers reflects the fact that many have come into care after entering the United Kingdom. Two of our care leavers were female.
- 3.11 Three of our care leavers remained with their foster carers through “staying put” arrangements. Seven lived independently (four in City social housing and three in the private rented sector), one lived in semi-independent supported accommodation, one in university accommodation and another in temporary placements that included supported accommodation.
- 3.12 The majority of our care leavers are involved in employment, education or training – with two attending university and five at college. Only two were not involved in employment, education or training.

4 The City as a corporate parent

- 4.1 Everyone who works for the City of London is a corporate parent to the children and young people who are in our care. This is not just those who have direct day-to-day contact with our children, such as social workers and foster carers, but all those who work for the City, including our elected Members and chief officers. A key role for elected Members and the City's officers is to promote opportunities for our looked after children and care leavers, and to be a challenge and a champion on their behalf.
- 4.2 The City is responsible for delivering a vision of corporate parenting which ensures that all children in care and those leaving care have the support, care and encouragement to reach their full potential.
- 4.3 As a good and effective corporate parent we will make decisions and behave in ways that:
- keep our children safe
 - help children and young people's material wellbeing
 - support children and young people in their education and training
 - provide appropriate health care for children looked after
 - promote employment
 - encourage enjoyment and achievement through leisure and continuing interests
 - help to develop personal skills
 - provide stability and a sense of security and belonging
 - understand family life
 - provide support after leaving care
 - empower our children and young people.
- 4.4 We have a safeguarding responsibility to all of our children. As corporate parents this means that any risk of harm to our individual children looked after must be assessed and plans put in place to keep them safe. These risks may include emotional and physical harm, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, bullying, gang activity, self-harm or suicide. Many of our children come into care with a first language other than English and may struggle to communicate issues that identify risk – a barrier we must overcome to ensure their safety. We must also make sure that our children have someone "outside the system" such as an advocate or independent visitor to look out for their interests.
- 4.5 To support us to deliver our responsibilities as a corporate parent, the City has a lead elected Member for children's safeguarding, and a Safeguarding Sub Committee made up of six elected Members. The Safeguarding Sub Committee acts as the City's corporate parenting board – providing oversight, challenge and leadership to achieve the best outcomes for our children and to ensure that these outcomes are delivered by all partners. This is a vital role through which our Members examine and address

the needs of our children and young people through the consideration “if this were my child”.

- 4.6 The City’s corporate parenting role is also supported and challenged by the City and Hackney Children’s Safeguarding Board, and the Children’s Executive Board (CEB). The CEB is a City-specific multi-agency strategic partnership which is responsible for delivering the priorities and objectives of the Children and Young People’s Plan, in which the needs of children looked after and care leavers are paramount.

5 What our children want

- 5.1 The City has developed a “Pledge” for its children looked after, young people and care leavers. Our Pledge is the City’s promise to provide the care and help that our children and young people have told us they want. We have also included the promises the City made in signing up to the Government’s “charter for care leavers”.

6 The Pledge

- 6.1 We will:

- be open and honest with you
- believe in you and encourage you to be the best you can be
- listen to you and respect and work with you to understand your point of view
- inform you at every point of your journey of the support that is available and your entitlements
- support you with information, advice, and practical and financial help, and provide emotional support and a named person you can contact when you want to
- find you a home that is right for you
- respect and honour your identity, encouraging you to be an individual but not make you different
- be there to support you and never judge
- provide space to talk one to one
- support you and help you to build life skills, and be a lifelong champion
- listen to your complaints and act on them
- help you to have your say
- provide chances to get involved in positive activities
- help you to meet other children and young people who are looked after or who are care leavers
- help you to work towards living independently and to plan for your future
- help you to stay with the right foster carer for you
- listen to your views about family contact and help that happen where possible

- help children and young people who have been in care for a while or who have left care to become a mentor to those who are new to care.

7 Delivering for our children and young people

7.1 To develop this strategy, we have examined our role and responsibilities as a corporate parent and reflected on the Pledge that our children have asked us to make to them. We can only be held to account and continuously improve if our vision and promises translate into detailed commitment and action. To ensure that this strategy is about what we are doing, and what we will do, we have set out below some of the ways in which the City is working, and will work, with our children to raise their life chances. These are grouped under the following headings:

- healthy and safe
- learning, achieving and enjoying
- listening and contributing
- independence and working
- individual and community.

8 Healthy and safe

8.1 We want our children to be healthy and safe. To achieve this we will:

- ensure that children and young people looked after have a comprehensive health assessment once a year – or twice a year for those aged under five years
- help our children understand why they have a medical assessment and its benefits as part of a “coming into care” pack
- ensure that children are immunised
- ensure that each child/young person is registered with a GP and a dentist, and has access to eye care
- monitor and track medical, dental and optical health checks to ensure that they happen
- ensure that language or literacy issues do not create a barrier to receiving or understanding health services
- provide information on promoting healthy lifestyles and sexual health that is appropriate to the age and maturity of our children
- deliver Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to our children looked after, wherever they are placed
- provide information, advice and assistance in respect of the use of drugs and/or alcohol if these are causing or likely to cause harm to health

- develop a “health passport” for our care leavers as a record of their health care
- support emotional wellbeing through tailored activity and, where necessary, specialist intervention
- provide age-appropriate and comprehensive multi-agency teenage pregnancy and parenthood support, prioritising the needs of children looked after, where a young person in our care becomes pregnant or a young father
- maximise the inclusion of children/young people with a disability in mainstream education, leisure and social activities
- ensure that our staff and partners remain trained to meet the health needs of children looked after, including sexual health, mental and emotional health, child sexual exploitation and substance misuse issues
- provide specific training for staff to identify the risk and/or experience of child sexual exploitation that may be experienced by unaccompanied asylum seeking minors
- support and encourage activity as part of a healthy lifestyle
- place children with foster carers who can best meet their needs – including those needs and preferences expressed by the child, young person and his or her parents
- only place with Independent Fostering Agencies that are rated “good” or “outstanding” by Ofsted
- commission quality placements and systematically monitor these arrangements to ensure that they provide stable placements which meet the physical, emotional and social needs of children
- risk assess the suitability of any placement prior to it progressing
- allocate a qualified, skilled social worker to ensure that the statutory requirements for the child’s care and protection are met
- ensure that our social workers visit children looked after every week for the first six weeks of placement and every six weeks thereafter
- allocate an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to chair review meetings, monitor the appropriateness and progress of plans, and ensure that the wishes and feelings of children are taken into account
- provide as much stability of placement as possible
- ensure that a permanency plan is in place for each child by the second child looked after review meeting
- provide access to an advocate and independent visitors
- safeguard children from bullying, racism, discrimination and harassment.

9 Learning, achieving and enjoying

9.1 Educational achievement is a significant factor in improving the life chances of children and young people in care. Participating in leisure activities can enhance self-esteem and confidence. We want our children to achieve outcomes and enjoy leisure activities that are as good as those of their peers. To achieve this we will:

- make the learning and educational needs of each of our children looked after a high priority
- support educational achievement and progress through a Virtual Head Teacher
- ensure that all school-aged children in care have a suitable full-time school place
- develop a Personal Education Plan (PEP) for all children and young people
- be ambitious for our children and young people and committed to supporting their progress and attainment
- monitor educational progress and attendance quarterly
- provide specialist therapeutic support, extra tuition or specialist equipment based on individual needs to support learning
- celebrate educational achievements such as exam results
- monitor expenditure of the Pupil Premium Plus to confirm that it correlates with the additional actions recorded in the PEP
- prioritise children in care for school admissions
- provide targeted support to those who are not in education, training or employment
- provide immediate alternative educational provision where school exclusion occurs
- ensure that all children looked after have access to local youth service provision
- provide local leisure centre membership for all looked after children
- support involvement with leisure and community opportunities that reflect our children's ethnicity, religion and culture
- provide equipment such as sports equipment or musical instruments to support involvement in chosen leisure activities
- ensure that children and young people in care have holidays, visits and outings in order to broaden their horizons
- enable access to play, leisure and recreation services for disabled children and young people.

10 Listening and contributing

10.1 Children and young people, and those leaving care, have the right to share their views, wishes and feelings. We are committed to listening to our children and young people

to ensure that their views shape decisions made about their lives and the services we deliver. To achieve this we will:

- consult children and young people about the decisions made about their lives and to help us to shape their futures through regular review meetings and meetings with their social worker
- seek creative and innovative ways to facilitate and encourage listening to our children and young people, both individually and collectively
- give children and young people the opportunity to influence our practice and policy through our Children in Care Council
- involve children and young people in the recruitment and induction of staff in Children and Families, and the commissioning of services for children and young people
- make sure that children and young people know how to make a complaint, and how to make a compliment, about the services they receive
- make sure that children and young people have information on services and the teams providing them through a “coming into care” pack
- provide a variety of opportunities for children and young people to meet senior staff and elected Members so that they can share their experiences, ideas and views
- provide an Independent Review Officer and advocacy service to help children and young people to contribute their views when they want someone to speak up on their behalf
- develop opportunities for looked after children and young people to deliver training to professionals and our elected Members on what it is like to be looked after and how to talk with young people about their issues.

11 Independence and working

11.1 We want our children looked after to develop and sustain independent lives. Developing life and employment skills is crucial for the future of our children and young people, and their economic wellbeing. To support this we will:

- undertake a “transitions assessment” within the pathway planning process to identify any needs for care and support in adulthood from adult services
- develop life skills training and peer learning to support young people in meeting the challenges of independent living – including budgeting, paying bills and dealing with emergencies
- help them to choose when to move on and give them the chance to stay put with their foster carer if they are not ready to do so
- help them to save for their future whilst they are in care
- give them apprenticeship opportunities with the City

- help them to gain confidence and skills through volunteering opportunities, work experience and participation in our time credits scheme
- provide chances to learn about how to deal with stress and how to be assertive in order to help our children and young people to deal with challenges in life and speak confidently for themselves
- give young people opportunities to shadow key senior officers in the City – including the Town Clerk
- provide tailored support and advice through our careers advisory service
- provide semi-independent accommodation for those who need a stepping stone into full independence
- remember them and provide them with ongoing support as they become an independent adult
- support young people in their tenancy to help them to settle into independent living.

12 Individual and community

12.1 We want the children and young people in our care to thrive as individuals. We want them to know themselves, their heritage and their community, and to support them to achieve this we will:

- help children and young people to understand their rights through the development of our “coming into care” pack
- help children and young people to keep photos and memories about important people in their life and places they have been
- help children and young people to feel proud and strong about their own culture, language and religion
- promote and facilitate contact with family members where this is in the best interests of a child or young person
- support our unaccompanied asylum seeking children to find and contact family members
- take into account any cultural, religious, communication or disability needs when matching children and young people with placements
- help our unaccompanied asylum seeking children to understand their heritage
- help children and young people to connect with the City and each other through events, outings, residential trips and the Children in Care Council
- support engagement and participation in cultural, religious and community activities.

13 Taking the strategy forward

- 13.1 The City will develop the action plan that supports this strategy and delivers the commitments that we have set out above. This plan will provide greater detail about the person or partner organisation responsible, the timescales for delivery and what we will achieve.
- 13.2 We will use this action plan to measure the delivery of this strategy. We will also look for evidence to show that we are delivering our Pledge to children looked after and care leavers.
- 13.3 The progress of delivery will be reported to and monitored by the Safeguarding Sub Committee, the CEB and our Children in Care Council.
- 13.4 The action plan will be refreshed annually over the lifetime of the strategy to ensure that it continues to drive improvements and meet the changing needs of children and young people.