

Introduction

There is a whole range of reasons why children and young people come into our care and cannot be cared for by their birth families. In these instances the local authority takes responsibility for these children and young people.

Corporate parenting is about how the local authority and its partners, such as the health service, housing and schools, act as responsible parents to children and young people living under their care. It is about how everyone including councillors, council officers, teachers, GP's, contractors etc all recognise they are corporate parents and identify what they can do to help us be the best corporate parents we can be to all children and young people in our care.

As responsible parents would, we should challenge ourselves by asking "would this be good enough for my child?" when providing a service for our children and young people in care. We also need to make sure they feel safe and secure, have stability in their lives and that we help them to achieve their full potential through supporting them in fulfilling their ambitions and aspirations.

Bury's 'Corporate Parenting Strategy' details how Bury Council, the health service and all its partners, will act as responsible parents to all children and young people in our care as well as those young people who have left our care and are entitled to our support. It is aimed at all corporate parents within Bury to ensure that we all play our part in making sure that our services help children and young people achieve their full potential whilst they are in our care and into their adult life.

Corporate parenting is not the sole responsibility of children's social care. It is the responsibility of the whole council, including councillors and our health service and other partners, to make sure that our services help children and young people achieve their full potential whilst they are in our care and into their adult life.

Our Children and Young People

In Bury over the last 2 years we have had between 300 – 340 children and young people in our care this excludes those children or young people receiving respite or short breaks.

The number of children in care has gradually increased in recent years and has been relatively steady for the last seven months.

In comparison to other local authorities, we have a larger number of children and young people in care this is shown by the rate of children in care per ten thousand children and young people living in Bury.

Bury does not have any children's homes owned/run by Bury local authority but it does have a number of foster carers within the area. This means that any child or young person who needs a residential placement will live in a placement provided by an independent company either in the Bury area or out of the Bury area.

Most of our children and young people in care either live in Bury or locally (within 20 miles). We know we need to ensure more children and young people are placed in Bury and locally, where this is in their best interests.

There has been an investment in the Fostering Service within Bury called 'Invest to Save' and this has set challenging targets to recruit more foster carers for children and young people who are in care in Bury.

We know we need more local foster care placements and that we need a wider range of care options for these families such as regular short breaks for children living away from their birth families, and we need more support carers, and carers who provide supported lodgings.

Our role as corporate parents does not end when children exit care. Our responsibilities continue beyond to cover young people who have been looked after by the local authority and whom the local authority has a duty and responsibility to support and keep in touch with when they leave care. The responsibility lasts up to the age of 21 or for some young people up to 25 years of age. Action for Children provides Leaving Care Services for Care Leavers in Bury in partnership with the children and young people in our care team.

Our Strategy

In Bury our corporate parenting strategy is about how we will be the best parents we can be for children and young people in our care. We will do this by meeting our legal duties and responsibilities and our 'Pledge' to children and young people in our care and care leavers.

Bury's Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out Bury's vision, commitment and responsibilities as an effective corporate parent for all children and young people in our care, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, disability or faith.

We will know we have been successful if our children and young people:-

- Are safe, secure and protected and *feel* safe, secure and protected
- Are as physically and emotionally healthy and active as possible
- Have high aspirations and achieve the best that they can
- Are able to live with their own families or friends whenever it is safe for them to do so.
- When they cannot live with their own families, they live close to home and school where it is in their best interests, and they are fully consulted throughout the process
- Move into independence and have a choice of suitable accommodation/placements when they are ready to leave foster or residential care
- Have a voice at a strategic, service and operation level in decision making and service development

In addition to this we will champion the needs of children and young people in care across the partnership.

In short, the key to good corporate parenting is to make sure that our children's 'journey through care into adulthood' is as smooth as possible and that decisions are made with the child and young person throughout this journey, so that they understand decisions and what they will mean to them and their lives.

Each individual child and young person's experience is unique and important so as good corporate parents we must aim to get this right for them first time. We may only get one opportunity and if we fail this will impact adversely on children/young people into their adult lives.

Our Vision

“To do our best as parents for children and young people in our care”

We will know we have achieved our vision when we can demonstrate how we have met our statutory responsibilities and our 'Pledge' to our children and young people. More importantly, we will know from our children and young people that they have had a good journey through care into adulthood.

We will have a delivery plan that shows how we will meet our priorities. Our priorities will be based on gaps or issues arising from meeting statutory responsibilities and what children and young people tell us about their journey through care.

The Lead Member for Children and Young People and the Director for Children's Services will make sure that our delivery plan, vision, strategy and the 'Pledge' will be reviewed annually.

Our Pledge

Bury Council has a strong commitment to listening and involving children and young people in our care. This is reflected in our 'Pledge' to them.

This is a set of promises to improve things in care for children in care.

They are:

- We will always tell you why you are in care
- We will make sure that you live with people who care about you and keep you safe
- We will let you live with your brothers and sisters and make sure you understand the reason if this is not possible
- We will involve you in decisions that affect you
- We will help you to talk about your feelings and listen to what you say
- We will support you to take part in hobbies and leisure activities
- We will help you to do well at school, college, and university
- We will make sure that you can live with your foster carers up until the age of 21 if this is what you want to do



Children and young people helped to inform, write and design Bury's 'Pledge' which was launched in 2009. The 'Pledge' was 'signed up to' by the Lead Member for Children and Young People, the Chief Executive of Bury Council and the Director for Children's Service. It has since been signed up to by Bury Children and Young People's Trust. The pledge is currently being reviewed.

In order for our "Pledge" to be meaningful we need to be able to demonstrate how we are meeting and plan to meet our 'Pledges' in the future. We also need to be able to tell our children and young people when we cannot meet any element of our 'Pledge'.

The Corporate Parenting Panel will monitor success in meeting our 'Pledge' to children and young people by being informed of current issues and messages from our Children in Care Council. The detail of how this will be done and the actions required will be included in the Corporate Parenting Delivery Plan. This will be reviewed annually to make sure we are moving forward and making a difference.

The Corporate Parenting Panel will be kept informed by the Children in Care Council of issues and messages in order to monitor how successfully it is meeting its pledge. The Children in Care Council will provide annual reports to the Corporate Parenting Panel and will represent children and young people in care. Bury Children's Rights will provide reports to the Corporate Parenting Panel about issues, complaints and grumbles and advocacy activity.

We will be able to tell children and young people how we are meeting our "Pledge" through the Children in Care Council website.

Roles and Responsibilities

Lead Member and Director for Children's Services

The Lead Member for Children and Young People, the Chief Executive and the Director for Children's Services:-

- Have a crucial duty to make sure that the Council, the health service, education services and their partners, are fulfilling their corporate parenting responsibilities; and that they are assured children and young people in our care are confident in the care they are given.
- Are ultimately responsible for making sure that the strategy is achieved and that any issues raised or gaps in service provision are addressed promptly and appropriately.
- Will work closely with the Corporate Parenting Panel to ensure that they have an overview of how the Corporate Parenting Strategy is progressing and that they know how well our children and young people are progressing on their journey through care and beyond.

Senior Officers and Elected Members

Senior officers and elected members across the Council are committed to:

- Listening to children and young people in our care.
- Knowing our children and young people in care population.
- Undertaking corporate parenting training.
- Knowing our "Pledge" to children and young people in care and how they can help meet it.
- Understanding and considering the impact of making decisions about services on children and young people in care.
- Making sure robust and appropriate governance arrangements are in place to monitor our role as corporate parents.
- Making sure strategic plans within Bury Council, Children and Young People's Trust consider the needs of children and young people in care.

We will achieve this by making sure the Corporate Parenting Panel, and the work undertaken within work areas, have representatives from a wide range of agencies who are in position to influence, change and make decisions regarding services and resources.

Staff and Elected Members

All elected members and staff within the Council, and our partner agencies, will make sure they:

- Are aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- Consider the needs of, and the impact, on children and young people in our care when planning and delivering services.
- Understand our children and young people in care.
- Keep up to date with research and practice developments
- Help to meet our "Pledge" to children and young people.

Learning and Education Service and the Virtual School for Looked After Children

- The Learning Directorate and specifically the Virtual School with its Education Support Service for Looked After Children, will maintain an overview of all Looked After Children and young people to ensure that they can maintain school place with support designed to meet their individual needs.
- The Learning directorate is well placed to have a positive influence on the education and career pathway of a Looked After child or young person by helping to raise aspirations and by providing effective and targeted support and guidance for individual pupils.
- Personal Education Plans will ensure that all needs met during important times such as transition between placements, transition to a new school, during exam periods and on the transition from school based education to employment or training.

Human Resources, Training and Work Opportunities

- We want all Looked After Children and young people to achieve their aspirations and goals along their career pathway and need to ensure that young people are aware of all the training and employment opportunities available to them.
- Bury Council as a major employer is well placed to provide work experience placements and or apprenticeships, within the various departments of the Council.

- Enabling young people to access relevant work experience and apprenticeships is essential for maintaining their sense of inclusion during the transition from adolescent to adulthood. In addition, these young people are well placed to raise awareness to staff, managers and elected members about the experiences of being looked after and leaving care and the issues that are important to them - their involvement in the delivery of training and awareness raising will be encouraged and promoted. Training and skills development for those involved in such activities will be provided and where possible appropriate accreditation given

How will we make this happen?

Corporate Parenting Governance Structure

The governance structure will help us deliver our corporate parenting strategy. To do this effectively we need to know:

- Our children and young people; as good responsible parents would.
- How we are delivering on our “Pledge” and meeting our statutory responsibilities.
- What we are doing well, and what are the gaps and issues.
- What are our priorities.
- What children and young people are telling us.

Corporate Parenting Panel

The Corporate Parenting Panel’s role is to have a clear overview of services for children and young people in our care and whether we are being ‘good’ corporate parents. This will be achieved by overseeing the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and monitoring of the Corporate Parenting Delivery Plan. They will be assured we are doing this by knowing:

- Services meet regulations and standards in a way that is also meaningful to young people.
- We are meeting our “Pledge” to children and young people.
- The Children in Care Council provides a wide range of children and young people in our care the opportunity to influence their journey through care.
- There are good working relationships across Bury Council, health partners, the Bury Children and Young People’s Trust and they are accountable for good quality services / provision. The experience / journey for children and young people should be as seamless as possible with all agencies acting as “one” corporate parent.
- How the main work areas are progressing having identified gaps and issues and new initiatives and plans for children and young people in our care.
- The performance of key stakeholders in relation to children and young people we are caring for.
- What our performance data tells us about children and young people in care.
- What children and young people tell us about their journey through care and their future aspirations.

Lead Member and Director for Children's Services

Children and young people will be invited to every Corporate Parenting Panel meeting or can ask to attend through Children in Care Council activities to discuss issues, or projects, they have highlighted as important to them. There will also be the opportunity for children and young people to invite members of Corporate Parenting Panel to meet with them about issues important to them.

The Corporate Parenting Panel will remain a small and focused group so as to swiftly manage its business. Wider partnership involvement will be incorporated within work areas and focused group work to support those work areas in order to ensure the most effective use of officer time.

For Corporate Parenting Panel terms of reference please see Appendix 1.

Children in Care Council

Our experience of actively involving children and young people in care in Bury tells us:

- That children and young people want to have a range of direct and indirect opportunities to 'have a say' and get involved.
- Some children and young people want to be involved in a number of different activities whilst others are selective, only being involved in a few or one off events.
- Formalised meetings can be difficult and too formal to make the most out of meeting with some children and young people.
- Established groups have a particular function and are effective at giving that group of children / young people a voice.. They can also become too focused on issues particular to them as individuals and not be representative of children and young people in care. Having Support from Bury Children's Rights helps us stay informed of the wider issues affecting Children and young people in care.
- Informal activities with staff and corporate parents give children and young people the opportunity to a) meet and start to build up a relationship outside of the more formal structures of their care and b) meet senior officers who make decisions about services in a low key way. As children and young people get to know who the officers are they will be more likely to approach them if, or when, they have issues in the future.
- Some of our children and young people in care live out of borough and so we need to ensure that whatever we do we give opportunities to these children and young people as well as those living in Bury

- Staff and carers working with children and young people come across recurring issues either regarding practice or day-to-day care of a child, or wider service delivery or decision making issues that are not picked up any other way.
- We need to make sure we feedback to children and young people what and why we have done, or not done, something.

In Bury we will make sure we listen and involve children and young people by:

Developing and maintaining specific groups to take on more formal Children in Care Council roles.

There are currently a number of existing groups that will be sustained and developed with children and young people These groups are:-

Mad House

A participation group for young people that are in our Care aged 11-16

Mega Mayhem

A participation group for children in our Care aged 4-10

Articulation

An annual group for Care leavers aged 16 -20, working on improving confidence and addressing issues that may affect care leavers through art, music and drama workshops

ORB

A group for adopted young people

We will also:

- Hold an annual Children and young people in care achievement awards
- Carry out an annual Children in Care survey/consultation.
- Support children and young people to be involved in the Children's Rights director for England annual consultation.
- Complete newly looked after visits for all children and young people who become accommodated by Bury local authority, giving children and young people a coming in to care pack with relevant information.
- Complete 'Moving On' interviews with young people when they leave our care
- Support the CiCC website.

- Produce publications for children and young people in care and care leavers to give them a voice and allow us to send information and updates to them.
- Run a range of one off activities for children and young people to meet with workers and managers involved in their care as well as Corporate Parenting Panel members.
- Make sure any planned groups feedback issues raised regarding particular issues. Ensure we give feedback on any consultation with young people in the form of "You said We did".
- Ensure all staff working with children and young people collate an issues log of grumbles or concerns that are raised in order to start identifying any common themes or issues.
- Provide an information pack for children and young people in care and care leavers, informing them of their entitlements and other support available to them
- Support the "This is not a suitcase campaign" eradicating the use of bin bags to transport children and young people in care' belongings

Young People will also be involved in:

- Training of elected members, council staff and children's social work service staff.
- Recruitment panels for children's social work services staff and senior officer posts.
- Delivery of Total Respect Training twice a year.

We will also support and encourage children and young people's involvement in:

- Bury Youth Parliament
- National events and activities run by Children's Rights Director, Children's Commissioner, A National Voice, Who Cares Trust events and the all party parliamentary group.

To enable and support children and young people we will train them as appropriate and identify ways we can recognise their work.

Work Areas

Reporting to the Corporate Parenting Panel will be four work areas namely on:

- Care placements
- Health and education
- Further education, employment and training
- Children's rights and participation

Chief Officers will lead on these work areas and be responsible for:

- Clear terms of reference and appropriate membership.
- Reporting quarterly updates to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- Providing an annual summary to the Corporate Parenting Panel of all work, identifying good practice, areas for improvement and identified issues/gaps.
- Attending Corporate Parenting Panel development workshops and days.

All work areas will:

- Identify the most appropriate way to progress priorities and have an overview of the whole area of work including links with other work areas.
- Develop terms of reference for the work area and ensure there is consideration of corporate and wider partners of any activity under this work area.
- Address issues for all children and young people in our care and care leavers aged 0 to 25 years including relevant transitions.
- Identify how we are meeting the current guidance and regulations, as well as identifying gaps and areas for development.
- Engage and involve the right partners at the right time in specific work.
- Make sure we are meeting our 'Pledge' to children and young people in our care, as well as identifying what we cannot do and why.

- Make sure the following issues are addressed as an integral part of the work:
 - ∇ The active involvement of children and young people in key areas of work.
 - ∇ Equality and diversity.
 - ∇ Safeguarding.
 - ∇ The messages from research and children and young people nationally and locally.
- Giving children and young people in care an 'ordinary life'.
- Making sure that what we are doing must be 'good enough' for our own children.
- Our children and young people feel 'cared about'

Care Placements

The Strategic Lead Placement Services will lead on this work area.

The objectives for this work area for 2013 - 2014 are:-

- To establish a Care Placements Overview Group to develop a clear overview of all placements for Bury children and young people in our care and accommodation for care leavers.
- To recruit more foster carers living in Bury and in the surrounding areas.
- To contribute to the development of a placements commissioning strategy for commissioning strategy for young people in our care and care leavers aged 16 years and over.

Health and Education

This group is relatively newly established. It is chaired by Karen Whitehead, Strategic Lead Health, Families & Partnerships.

The objectives for 2013 - 14 for this work area will be to:

- Have a cross-agency understanding and agreement regarding the commissioning of health provision for Bury's children and young people.
- Making sure mainstream health services are promoted and accessible.
- Improve the quality of Personal Health Plans, and Personal Education Plans
- Monitor how the pupil premium is being spent for each individual child in care
- Establish a corporate parenting Parent/Teacher Association

Further Education, Employment & Training

This work area will be led by *to be decided*

Objectives for this work area for 2013-14 are to:

- To establish a further education, employment and training group to develop a clear overview of all opportunities for Bury care leavers.
- Audit practice against the guidance to help identify work priorities and gaps.
- Increase the number of work experience opportunities for young people in our care and care leavers.
- Focus on employment and apprentice opportunities for care leavers, across the council and in partner agencies.

Children's Rights and Participation

This work area will be led by *to be decided*

Objectives for this work area for 2013 – 14 are to:

- To establish a Children's Rights and Participation group to develop a clear overview of children's rights and participation for Bury children and young people in our care and care leavers.
- Undertake a self-assessment of participation and children's rights activity across the Council to ensure that children in care are included
- Ensure children and young people receive an information pack when they come into care
- Ensure there is communication between children and young people in care and the Corporate Parenting Panel

Performance Monitoring

We need to have both qualitative and quantitative information on children and young people in our care if we are to understand and meet their needs. We need to understand our 'corporate parenting story' so that we can start to use the data to find out how our children and young people are doing

We will focus on understanding the data we have and what it tells us as a starting point. Once we understand our 'corporate parenting story' we will then identify what else we need to, and want to, know about how our children and young people are doing and whether we are being good, responsible corporate parents.

The completion of surveys, interviews and focus group work through the Children in Care Council will make sure we have a qualitative understanding from children and young people.

Independent Reviewing Officers

The Independent Reviewing Officers have a statutory responsibility to quality assure how well Bury Council is meeting its corporate parenting responsibilities. They are based in the Safeguarding Unit.

The Safeguarding Unit manager will report regularly to the Corporate Parenting Panel and submit the IRO annual report.

The Independent Reviewing Officer will also have a role in relation to ensuring that the local authority, and its partners, are getting it right for children and young people in our care and being good effective corporate parents.

The Independent Reviewing Officers have an escalation process to identify to managers if there are issues that they need to address for individual children or young people in our care. This will ensure that if these are not addressed appropriately the Independent Reviewing Officer can consider escalating this internally and to CAFCASS if needed.

The Safeguarding Unit Manager will work closely with the Strategic Lead for Placement Services.

Putting the 'Corporate' Into Corporate Parenting

Corporate Parenting is about all elected members, officers with Bury Council, health services and partner agencies identifying what they can do in their current roles to ensure our children and young people are parented well.

In order to do this the Corporate Parenting Panel will make sure that Bury Council and its' partners puts the 'corporate' into corporate parenting. This will ensure we have wider corporate and partner engagement in the delivery of services to children and young people in our care.

The Board will also make sure the "parenting" goes into corporate parenting. This will be done by ensuring that we not only know what our performance data tells us about our children and young people in care as group but that we also know what children and young people's dreams and aspirations are for the future.

The Strategic Lead Placement Services will develop links with partners to support a range of developments that will make sure we all work together as good responsible parents.

The priorities for putting the corporate into corporate parenting are:

- To make sure all service areas are aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities as employees and in relation to their area of work.
- To make sure that our contractors fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities as appropriate.
- To provide a range of work experience and employment opportunities across the council and in partner agencies.
- Establishing a Corporate Parenting Parent Teacher Association where staff volunteer to be a member and get involved in raising funds for additional activities and raising the profile of children and young people in care.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Terms of Reference

Appendix 2 Corporate Parenting Delivery Plan 2013/2014