

Bristol Corporate Parenting Strategy

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Foreword

To be drafted from the Mayor following SLT – underline that it's a city commitment not just council commitment

Introduction

Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe our collective responsibility to ensure the best outcomes for children in the care of Bristol City Council, and those young people who have left our care. Children in care and care leavers are amongst the most vulnerable children and young people in our city. As corporate parents, it is our role to ensure that they are safe, happy, and given every opportunity to achieve their full potential.

In 2017 the Children and Social Work Act introduced a set of Corporate Parenting Principles for children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25 years. For the first time, it enshrined our collective responsibilities in a duty to:

- Act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of children in care and care leavers;
- Encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- Take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- Help those children and young people gain access to, and make best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- Promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes for those children and young people;
- Be safe, have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
- Prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

This strategy describes our city approach to delivering on those Corporate Parenting Principles to improve the lives of the children in and leaving our care. It outlines our vision and objectives, reports on some of our recent achievements and developments and sets out how we intend to achieve our goals. We will also outline the context in which this strategy sits, and the governance structure in place to ensure that our vision is achieved.

This strategy sits alongside our Pledge to children in care and care leavers which outlines our commitments to them, and the support they can expect from us.

Our Vision

Bristol is committed to being an effective, caring, and ambitious corporate parent. Children and young people are at the heart of everything we do and we will do everything we can to make sure that children in our care and care leavers are set up for life.

We will care about children in care and care leavers and not just for them and will ensure the same standard of care as any good parent. This means we have high aspirations for our children and will be strong advocates for them. We will do everything we can to equip the children and young people in our care and care leavers with the skills needed to live a fulfilling, successful, and rewarding life.

This strategy is part of a broad range of activity which supports our shared aim to improve provision for children in care and care leavers including:

- A Pledge to Children in Care and Care leavers, informed by the views of our children and young people
- Corporate Parenting Panel chaired by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
- An active Children in Care Council and Care Leaver Forum to ensure that the voices of young people remain central to our work
- A Corporate Parenting annual report that is owned by Corporate Parenting Panel and presented to full council
- The HOPE Virtual School working with schools, colleges, other providers of education and training and children's social care to improve educational outcomes for children in care and care leavers
- A [Placement Sufficiency Plan](#) that sets out how we will deliver the range and number of high quality placements needed by children in care and care leavers
- A Youth Housing Plan that includes a new Youth MAPS Service dedicated to preventing homelessness and supporting the provision of a range of suitable accommodation and support options for young people leaving their foster care or children's home placement
- A commitment to ensuring that corporate parenting responsibilities are embedded in all applicable policies, strategies and commissioning arrangements
- Delivery of [Bristol's Strategy for Children, Young People and Families 2016 -2020](#)
- This strategy is supported by the Council's overarching [Corporate Strategy 2018-23](#), in particular, 'Wellbeing' and 'Empowering and Caring' themes and the key commitment to be 'great corporate parents and safeguard children and vulnerable adults, protecting them from exploitation or harm'.

Messages from Bristol's children in care

We asked children and young people in care what is important to them, they told us:

- We need the services we appreciate to continue.
- We want flexibility in where we have health assessments and quick access to a range of different therapies when we are ready.
- We'd like better access to gym facilities and to be able to have hobbies that interest us
- We want a social worker we like who doesn't keep changing, and we want to get to know each other.
- We need you to look out for us as you would your own children. We need you to prioritise our education and help us with our homework
- As we get older, we need you to support us to access good work experience placements and help us into work and training so that we are ready to start living independently when the time is right
- Our foster carers are really important to us. We'd like to know more about them before moving in with them. We'd like them to encourage us to stay in care, and support us when we move
- We need you to recognise our achievements and celebrate them.

- We like it when you listen to us, when you talk to us and ask us what we think
- As our parents, we need your support, protection, and encouragement. We need you to be our champions and do everything possible to ensure we achieve as much as we can

Our Corporate Parenting Values

Bristol is committed to working in line with the following values:

The voice of children and young people will be at the heart of service development, policy, practice, and the democratic decision making process

The responsibility for ensuring that children in care and care leavers achieve good outcomes lies across the whole of Bristol City Council, as well as with partners

Wherever safe and possible, children and young people should live with their family. We will ensure that the children in our care are only those who *need* to be in care

Prevention and early intervention is a central element of our support for children and families to give them every opportunity to stay together

Where care becomes necessary, we will explore options for living with wider family and friends networks wherever possible

We will always strive to provide the best quality placement possible, that meets each child's needs and offers placement stability

Children in care have the right to access the best education possible and the support they need to meet their full potential

We will champion and support young people as they leave our care and start to live independently, doing everything we can to make sure they are set up for life

Context

At a glance:		
	2015	2017
Number of Children in care:	700	685
Rate of Care:	76 per 10,000 children	73 per 10,000
Number of children in care living with foster families:	587	550
Number of children in care living outside the local authority area:	251	291
Number of care leavers:	307	445*

*definition has changed, would be 339 on 2015 definition.

Our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment includes a Chapter on Children in Care and Care Leavers which provides a detailed assessment of the current needs of our children in care and care leavers.

Financial

As a city, we must be ambitious for children in care and care leavers; we must do our best to equip children and young people for life with the long term aim of reducing the overrepresentation and on-going costs of supporting care leavers in vulnerable adult populations.

Commissioning services over the next few years of this plan will be exceptionally challenging, given the continued downward pressure on public finances. Nevertheless, Bristol City Council and partners are collectively committing to maintain strong and effective provision, and improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children in the city, while at the same time managing the effect of reducing public finances.

How are we doing?

Progress against the 9 Corporate Parenting Objectives we set out in 2015.

Strategic Objectives	What's working well <i>NB 2016 figures</i>	The challenges that remain
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<p>Objective 1 - Support more children to live safely with their family and reduce the need to be cared for by intervening early</p>	<p>By applying our threshold guidance, investing in early help, remodelling children's social care services and implementing Signs Of Safety© (an approach to supporting children in families which focuses on the strengths of the family) our rate of children in care per 10,000 children has fallen from 76 in 2015 to 73 in 2016.</p> <p>This places Bristol 9th lowest of 11 in our statistical neighbour group and 6th lowest of the 8 core cities. It includes the increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children who need our care and who now account for 6% of children in care in Bristol.</p>	<p>Referrals to children's social care are high, partners need to work together to ensure that children's needs are assessed and met at the earliest point of intervention.</p> <p>Bristol has more 16-17 year olds entrants to care than the national average. We must focus on supporting teenagers to live safely and successfully within their family.</p>
<p>Objective 2 - If children cannot remain in their parents' care, look to their extended family for support first</p>	<p>The percentage of children looked after by family members or other people to whom they were connected grew by 4% between 2015 and 2016.</p>	<p>Build upon our approaches to supporting families to care. Value families that care for children, whether through fostering, special guardianship or adoption.</p>
<p>Objective 3 – Ensure that children receive the right services and only remain in care for as long as they need to. Make sure that this is informed by an assessment and plan which they and their family understand and which they have been able to contribute to</p>	<p>Quality assurance, audit and independent reviews of children in care evidence this for the majority of our children. All children in care and care leavers have a care or pathway plan setting out the aim of care and plans for the future.</p>	<p>Reduce the rate of children that return to our care by delivering an effective edge of care service.</p>
<p>Objective 4 - Ensure that being in care is an enriching experience for children and that we equip them for a successful and fulfilling future</p>	<p>Children in care and care leavers have accessed a range of universal and targeted services as well as specific opportunities provided by Bristol's Virtual School, Children in Care Council and Children's Social Care. We have celebrated the success of our care leavers at an annual event.</p>	<p>Children, young people and their carers ask us to develop the 'Bristol offer'; to help them with the cost of travel in the City, to enable them to access the gym and take part in other activities that our museums, libraries, sports and community centres have to offer.</p>

<p>Objective 5 - Ensure enough good quality placements for children by recruiting, retaining and commissioning sufficient foster carers to offer children placement choice, to keep children placed locally and to achieve high levels of placement stability</p>	<p>Bristol City Council gained Fostering Network's accreditation as a Fostering Friendly Employer in 2016, offering flexible and supportive conditions to foster carers in its employ.</p> <p>In 2016, 82% of children in our care were placed in a foster family, 7% more than the national average and 2% more than in 2015.</p> <p>Long term placement stability is a key indicator for the achievement of good outcomes, was above the national average in 2016 with 72.4% of children in the same placement for 2 of the past two and a half years. This was an improvement on the 2015 position for Bristol and nationally of 68%.</p> <p>Additionally, a higher percentage of young people continue to live with their former carer under Staying Put arrangements beyond the age.</p>	<p>When children need our care, we want to enable children to live in or near to Bristol and to reduce the number of moves experienced by children in the previous twelve months. This helps children to feel safe and to remain connected to family and friends, to stay at the school they attended before entering care and to continue with hobbies and activities. To do this, we must encourage and value Bristol foster carers, doing all that we can to ensure Bristol is a fostering friendly city, with employers, businesses and partners all playing their part.</p>
<p>Objective 6 - Ensure that all young people are in safe and secure accommodation by offering appropriate accommodation to 16-18 year olds who meet the threshold for care</p>	<p>In 2016 91% of care leavers aged 19-21 were recorded as living in suitable accommodation. This was above the national average, placed us second amongst statistical neighbours and highest of the core cities.</p>	<p>Young people tell us that when they are moving on they feel rushed and have limited or no choice. This means that sometimes they feel isolated and unsafe in their new accommodation. We are working to develop a more planned approach to moving on, that offers young people greater choice and control.</p>

<p>Objective 7 - Close the attainment gap for children in care by ensuring that they receive good quality education and that we support them to have high aspirations</p>	<p>Outcomes for Children in Care have improved over all at Key Stage 4 with particular gains made in the number of CiC achieving a good GCSE pass in Maths (22%). The Virtual School predicts further improvement 2017 exam results in terms of 5 good passes at GCSE with English and Maths.</p> <p>There have also been improvements in outcomes for the children in Early Years and Foundation Stage with 66% predicted to attain a good level of development this year.</p>	<p>Fixed term exclusions and authorised absences remain too high and attainment too low. We must work together to ensure schools are equipped to deliver the best education and that children in care and care leavers can attend and achieve.</p>
<p>Objective 8 - Improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers, including increasing the percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training</p>	<p>56% of care leavers were recorded as being in education, employment or training in 2016. This was a significant improvement on 2015, was 7% above the national average, second amongst statistical neighbours and highest of core cities.</p>	<p>Performance is below that of peers for our 19-21 year old care leavers. As partners we must continue to champion our young people with colleges, training providers and employers, helping them to continue to offer opportunities that take advantage of the talents our young people.</p>
<p>Objective 9 – Improve the health and wellbeing of children in care and care leavers, and provide services of a high standard to support their needs</p>	<p>An audit of the health of children in care shows that our children’s physical health is good.</p> <p>Investment in emotional and mental health services, together with an NHS England Personal Budget pilot aims to improve emotional and mental health outcomes for children in care and care leavers.</p>	<p>Fewer children had a looked after health assessment, dental check or completed strengths and difficulties questionnaire in 2015-16 than in 2014-15.</p> <p>Health and Children’s Social Care are taking action jointly to improve outcomes.</p>

Our Priorities

In order to achieve our vision to be a good corporate parent, we have developed the following 7 priorities.

1. Families receive the help they need when they need it (right response, right assessment, right help, right time).
2. Children are supported to live safely within their families or with people who know them best. When this is not possible, children move to a permanent family or care placement without delay.
3. Children and young people tell us what's important to them and this influences what we do and the way we design and develop our services.
4. Being in care is an enriching experience that equips children for a successful life.
5. Deliver good quality care placements and move on accommodation for care leavers.
6. Hold high aspirations and close the attainment gap for children in care and increase the percentage of care leavers in education, training and employment.
7. Improve health and well-being by providing high quality services and information to children, young people and carers.

These priorities will help us deliver in each of the outcome areas set out in the Children, Young People and Families' Strategy:

Outcome	Priority
Safe and Nurtured	2, 5
Healthy and Active	4, 7
Respected and Involved	1, 3
Responsible and Achieving	6

Priority 1 - Families receive the help they need when they need it (Right Child, Right Service, Right Time, Right Place).

It is always preferable to provide the necessary support to families to allow children to remain living with their own family than to seek to move them away into care.

Early intervention is key to providing effective support to children and their families, and preventing the need for care. This requires a 'whole-system' response, with everyone playing their part in supporting families to meet the needs of their children.

Action: We will strengthen our offer to families by:

- ensuring that early intervention and targeted support across the City is joined up and delivers good outcomes for all children and families, to prevent the need for care
- developing our preventative services for children on the Edge of Care

- reducing social work caseloads thereby enabling social workers to do purposeful work
- developing an exit from care team to support birth families who, with help, can reunify and care for their own children

Priority 2 - Children are supported to live safely within their families or with people who know them best. When this is not possible, children move to a permanent family or care placement without delay.

All children need a permanent family arrangement wherever possible, provided in a timely way. When children enter care, we will be focussed on determining the right plan for either their return home, or for their exit from care to a permanent family arrangement.

Having a clear and accessible care plan or pathway plan, influenced by the child or young person's wishes and feelings, is crucial to ensuring individual needs are met and that leaving care happens at a time that's right for them.

Action: Ensure that every child at risk of entering care has a family network meeting. Where it is necessary for a child to become cared for, we will always explore opportunities for the child to remain with their extended family members or people connected to them.

Action: Assess, plan for and review the needs of every child in care and every care leaver and ensure that a permanency plan is developed for all children and young people in our care within 4 months of them coming into care.

Action: Quality assure care plans and pathway plans to ensure that they are accessible and have been developed with children, young people and where appropriate, their family.

Priority 3 - Children and young people tell us what's important to them and this influences what we do and the way we design and develop our services.

It is important that we listen to children and young people in our care, but more than that we have a duty to consider their views and to respond by letting children and young people know how their views have helped us shape our services and develop our city.

Children and young people can tell us how we are doing and what's important to them. They can also highlight areas where small changes can make the biggest difference.

Action: Develop a participation strategy for children in care and care leavers that takes their views into account at every level and builds upon the work of our Children in Care Council and Care Leavers United Bristol (CLUB) group.

Action: Involve children and young people their Child in Care and Pathway Plan Review, in staff appointments, in the design, development and commissioning of services as well as in assessing the quality of the service they receive.

Action: In response to children and young people's views we will design our new Pledge and local offer to children in care and care leavers and will ensure young people contribute to our Corporate Parenting Panel.

Priority 4 - Being in care is an enriching experience that equips children for a successful life.

All children should have access to opportunities to play, socialise, exercise, and learn. Children in care are no different, we will ensure that children in care in Bristol can access cultural, faith based, leisure and social activities and that we encourage them to take part in activities in our communities. Children in care and care leavers are an important part of the city of Bristol and must have equal opportunities to learn, play and grow.

Action: All Partners will work together to deliver a children in care and care leaver EPIC card that will give access to cultural, sports and leisure opportunities for our children and young people.

Action: We will support care leavers into adulthood by extending our offer to 25 and expanding opportunities to prepare for adulthood through our ASDAN accredited Living Independently Short Course and through extending our staying put, staying close programmes.

Action: We will bring forward proposals to support care leavers by alleviating the burden of Council Tax when our young people first leave care.

Action: We will champion our children and young people and celebrate their achievements together.

Priority 5 - Deliver good quality care placements and move on accommodation for care leavers locally.

We need to ensure that we can access a range of high quality care placements to meet the needs of children coming into care. In order to offer children stability and the opportunity to maintain relationships with family and friends we need to be able to place the majority of children in well-matched foster families within twenty miles of their home postcode.

We will proactively recruit foster carers who can accommodate specific children such as brothers and sisters, children with disabilities, and older children.

Action: We will develop as a fostering friendly city where foster carers are the city's VIPs and will publish a city commitment to our foster carers, asking businesses and other organisations to join us in supporting families that foster.

Action: We will actively promote fostering and consider the needs foster carers in policy making across the city.

Action: We will ensure that training, placement and financial support for foster carers helps attract and retain this skilled group.

Action: We will deliver a range of supported and other accommodation for care leavers through the new Youth MAPS service. We will plan with young people for the time they are ready to move into independence and will offer choice, such as the option to stay close¹ when we can.

Priority 6 - Hold high aspirations and close the attainment gap for children in care and increase the percentage of care leavers in education, training and employment.

In order for children and young people to achieve good outcomes we must ensure that they receive the best education possible. We will choose good or outstanding schools for our children and young people and will aim to minimise any disruption to children's education when they enter care or move placement.

As young people progress, we will provide good quality work experience placements that help young people make choices about their future career path. We will support our young people to progress in further and higher education and into employment through apprenticeships and traineeships.

Action: We will be aspirational for our children and young people and will work with schools to reduce absence and ensure that Personal Education Plans and Pupil Premium supports attainment.

Action: The HOPE Virtual School and the Learning City 'Learning in Education Challenge Group' will champion children in care and care leavers. Together, they will challenge our schools, education and training providers and employers to deliver the highest quality education and training opportunities.

Action: We will keep children and young people's views central to their education and career plans and will monitor the impact of our actions on closing the attainment gap between our children and young people and their peers

Priority 7 - Improve health and well-being by providing high quality services and information to children, young people and carers.

Children in Care often have greater health needs than their peers and may have difficulties accessing health care. The health of children is overseen by Community Paediatricians and the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children. They ensure that all children and young people have a holistic assessment of their health needs and an action plan setting out how these will be met, including dental care and emotional health and wellbeing.

Care Leavers are provided with a Health Passport so that they have the information they need to continue to look after their health as they enter adulthood.

There is a dedicated Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service for children in care and, as young people leave care, there is additional support available aimed at promoting good mental health at this crucial time in a young person's life.

Action: We will improve the timeliness of health assessments and ensure that health care action plans are shared with carers, children and young people and other professionals involved in their care as appropriate.

¹ Bristol is a Staying Close Pilot Authority, offering young people leaving children's homes the opportunity to live near-by with support from the children's home staff team.

Action: We will pilot the use of personal budgets to support emotional and mental health

Action: We will implement the recommendations of CQC thematic review 2017 into children and young people's mental health.

Action: Review the quality of health passports with care leavers and implement their recommendations for improvement.

We will

Add in a governance diagram

DRAFT