



Foreword

by the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member

Children and young people looked after by Dudley Council are amongst the most vulnerable members of our society. As corporate parents we want for Children in Care what every good parent would want for their own children.

We therefore all have a duty to ask ourselves:

If this were my child, would it be good enough for them?

In Dudley, we want to help Children and Young People fulfil their potential. We will work alongside children in care to make sure that we understand what is important to them and what our priorities should be.

Every elected member is a Corporate Parent and all members and officers of the Council have a responsibility to improve the life chances of children and young people in care.

This document highlights the collective responsibility we all have in fulfilling our duties as corporate parents to all young people looked after by the Council setting out what our priorities will be for the next 2 years.

Signed.....

Cllr Peter Lowe
Leader of the Council

Signed.....

Cllr Ian Cooper
Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Signed.....

Tony Oakman
Strategic Director for People



Why is a strategy needed?

The aim of this strategy is to set out the key priorities for the Corporate Parenting Board over the next 2 years. It is to be read by young people, their families, members of the Corporate Parenting Board and other interested professionals.

Most children and young people in Dudley enjoy happy and successful lives living within their own families. If, however, families experience problems or stress, they can call upon the help offered by a range of agencies, to help keep the family living together. However, for some children and young people this might not be enough to ensure their safety and well-being so, either through agreement with their parents, or through court proceedings, these children might come to be cared for by the Local Authority and become a “Looked After Child”.

Sometimes, with support, children can quickly be returned home, or to family members or friends. However, for some children long term care outside of the family home needs to be provided and the Local Authority becomes the ‘Corporate Parent’, taking on the responsibility of overseeing their safety and wellbeing.

Corporate Parenting is therefore a term used for the collective responsibility of the council and other agencies to ensure the care and protection of Children Looked After. The ultimate aim of the Corporate Parent is to make sure that these children receive the same opportunities and life chances that any good parent seeks for their own child.

Children in care generally experience poor life chances compared to children who live at home within their families. Greater numbers of looked after children become unemployed or involved in crime. Too few go on to university or rewarding careers. There is evidence that life chances can be improved by ensuring that they live as locally as possible in safe environments, are not moved around unnecessarily and above all, are provided with a stable and caring home.

We therefore aim through this strategy to set out the care and support that will be provided to looked after children so that we can provide the opportunities and care needed for them to achieve in life.

The Dudley Pledge sets out our priorities for looked after children. This has involved talking to lots of young people along with the professionals who work with them to make sure that we understand what is important for young people and how we can provide the best possible care.

It will be the responsibility of the Corporate Parenting Board to make sure that the Local Authority is delivering on the pledge and that we continue to talk to young people about the care we provide.

Some Key Facts

- Dudley looks after more children than other local authorities across the country. Our rate of Children in Care (per 10,000 children under 18) was 112 compared to a statistical neighbour rate of 69.2
- As at 31st March 2016 - 726 children were in care.
- Most children that come in to care are because of abuse and neglect representing 62% of the new admissions to care during 2014/15.
- 43.8% of children who became looked after during 2014/15 were under the age of four. In 2015/16 the figure was 46.1%.
- The largest group of children staying in care in Dudley are currently aged between 10 and 15 years.
- About half of our looked after children (51%) are placed within Dudley.
- However, most of our looked after children live within 20 miles of Dudley (86%).
- The number of children leaving care is increasing. 190 children left care during 2014/15 compared to 134 during 2011/12.
- Children on average spend 3.4 years in care.
- Children and Young People in stable placements (70.8%) are in line with our statistical neighbours (69.4%) 2015/16.

The Dudley Pledge to children in care

1 Where you live and who you live with

We want you to live in a placement where you feel loved, safe and happy.

2 School, college and learning

We want you to enjoy learning and to do as well as you are able to.

3 Support

We want you to feel listened to and know that there are people who are there for you and will answer your questions.

4 Leisure, hobbies and free time

We want you to have opportunities to develop your talents, have fun and take part in various hobbies and activities.

5 Education, employment and training

We want you to be able to take up further education, employment or training once you have left school.

6 Family and friends

We want you to have up to date information about your family, friends and carers whenever possible.

7 Health and wellbeing

We want you to be as healthy and as well as you possibly can and to feel good about yourself.

1

Where you live and who you live with

We want you to live in a placement where you feel loved, safe and happy.

- You have explanations about why you are in care and information about your background
- You have contact with family and friends unless to do so would cause you harm
- We will keep things that are important to you safe
- You are involved in where you go to live and have information about where you are going to live and why
- We ask you about how things are and seek your views
- When you move, those things that are important are able to go with you
- You have a copy of your care plan
- You are prepared and given information if you need to move a new placement

2

School, college and learning

We want you to enjoy learning and to do as well as you are able to.

- You have a place in a school or college that is able to provide you with the right kind of education
- You have a personal education plan that identifies what you need
- There is a teacher in school who will support you
- You get additional help and support in order to do school/ college work
- If you are bullied and teased at school about being in care you have a teacher who will help you
- You are encouraged to take part in school holidays, clubs, trips and consent will be sorted quickly
- You don't have to change school you are at unless absolutely necessary
- You are supported to travel to school independently wherever possible (34%)
- If you are unable to attend school for any reason alternative education will be provided

3

Support

We want you to feel listened to and know that there are people who are there for you and will answer your questions.

- You have a social worker who will visit you and talk to you privately in a place where you feel comfortable
- You have carers who are able to talk to you about things and help you develop knowledge and skills when you leave care
- Independent Reviewing Officer makes sure your care plan is being followed
- You are able to contact an independent person if you need support to talk about something that you are unhappy about
- You are provided with the opportunity to get together with other looked after young people to discuss things important to you and share things in common
- The information available to you will be easy to understand and, where necessary, changed into pictures, symbols or a different language so that you can understand it.
- If you are living independently you will be entitled to money towards food, clothing and personal care for an amount which is advised nationally for care leavers.
- You will be offered tenancy support to prepare you for running your own home before you live independently as well as when you do.
- You will be able to and know how to contact a social worker if your social worker is not at work because of illness or is on holiday.

4

Leisure, hobbies and free time

We want you to have opportunities to develop your talents, have fun and take part in various hobbies and activities.

- You are encouraged and supported to be involved in clubs and activities
- Money will be available to support you in activities and buy essential equipment where necessary
- Opportunities are provided for you to try out new activities
- Carers support you and provide you with information about what is available in your area and encourage you to attend
- Opportunities are provided for you to try out new activities
- You can swim at least 25 metres
- You are able to have a leisure card that gives you access to a range of leisure activities provided by Dudley Sport and Leisure
- You have the opportunity to play an instrument

5 Education, employment and training

We want you to be able to take up further education, employment or training once you have left school.

- You are able to participate in work experience opportunities
- You are supported by carers and have all necessary information about different options available
- You are provided with books and equipment you need to do work/ complete studies
- Someone is available to you to offer support and advice especially financial advice
- Make sure you have opportunities to be involved in activities you enjoy and help build your confidence
- You are able to have driving lessons where appropriate and necessary

6 Family and friends

We want you to have up to date information about your family, friends and carers whenever possible.

- Your view about family and friends are listened to and taken seriously, particularly about how, when and where you have contact with family
- If you can't have contact for whatever reason we will make sure you are told why and understand the reasons for this
- Your social worker gives you news about family on regular basis where possible
- You are able to keep in contact with your friends whilst in care
- You can invite friends back to where you are living and stay overnight with their family where appropriate
- You are able to have the opportunity to develop your 'Life Story' to recognise your past, present and future.
- You are able to have access to and copies of photos from when living at home if you would like them.

7 Health and wellbeing

We want you to be as healthy and as well as you possibly can and to feel good about yourself.

- Support you by providing access to specialist health services if you need them
- Provide a trusted person who you can talk to
- Arrange for you to be cared for by individuals who are able to support you to be healthy and provide information where necessary
- Register you with a GP and local dentist
- Provide you with access to regular health and dental assessments/ checks
- Make sure you have opportunities to be involved in activities you enjoy and help build your confidence

How will we know?

1 Where you live and who you live with	
Aim	How we will know
You have explanations about why you are in care and information about your background	Children's Feedback
You have contact with family and friends unless to do so would cause you harm	Children's Feedback
We will keep things that are important to you safe	Children's Feedback
You are involved in where you go to live and have information about where you are going to live and why	Children's Feedback
We ask you about how things are and seek your views	Children's Feedback LAC Participation at reviews
When you move those things that are important to you are able to go with you	Children's feedback
You have a copy of your care plan	% Children with up to date care plan Timeliness of reviews
You are prepared and given information if you need to move a new placement	Children's feedback

How will we know?

2 School, college and learning	
Aim	How we will know
You have a place in a school or college that is able to provide you with the right kind of education	Education attainment for LAC LAC exclusion rate
You have a personal education plan that identifies what you need	PEP timeliness Quality of PEP's Children with up to date PEP
There is a teacher in school who will support you	Children's feedback
You get additional help and support in order to do school/ college work	Pupil premium spend per LAC Education Attainment for LAC
If you are bullied and teased at school about being in care you have a teacher who will help you	Children's feedback
You are encouraged to take part in school holidays, clubs, trips and consent will be sorted quickly	Children's Feedback Placement feedback
You don't have to change school you are at unless absolutely necessary	Number of school moves per LAC
You are supported to travel to school independently wherever possible	Children's Feedback Placement feedback
If you are unable to attend school for any reason alternative education will be provided	Number of LAC with 25 hours or more provision

How will we know?

3 Support	
Aim	How we will know
You have a social worker who will visit you and talk to you privately in a place where you feel comfortable	LAC visits Average change of social workers per LAC Children's feedback
You have carers who are able to talk to you about things and help you develop knowledge and skills when you leave care	Children's feedback Placement stability
Independent Reviewing Officer makes sure your care plan is being followed	Timeliness of reviews
You are able to contact an independent person if you need support to talk about something that you are unhappy about	Numbers of LAC children using advocacy services
You are provided with the opportunity to get together with other looked after young people to discuss things important to you and share things in common	Children's feedback

How will we know?

4 Leisure, hobbies and free time	
Aim	How we will know
<p>You are encouraged and supported to be involved in clubs and activities</p> <p>Money will be available to support you in activities and buy essential equipment where necessary</p>	<p>Children's Feedback</p> <p>Placement feedback</p>
<p>Opportunities are provided for you to try out new activities</p>	<p>Children's Feedback</p> <p>Placement feedback</p>
<p>Carers support you and provide you with information about what is available in your area and encourage you to attend</p>	<p>Children's Feedback</p> <p>Placement feedback</p>
<p>Opportunities are provided for you to try out new activities</p>	<p>Children's Feedback</p> <p>Placement feedback</p>
<p>You can swim at least 25 metres</p>	<p>No. LAC with 25meter swimming certificate</p>
<p>You are able to have a leisure card that gives you access to a range of leisure activities provided by Dudley Sport and Leisure or by the local authority in which you live</p>	<p>No of eligible LAC with leisure card</p>
<p>You have the opportunity to play an instrument</p>	<p>Children's Feedback</p> <p>Placement feedback</p>

How will we know?

5 Employment and training	
Aim	How we will know
You are able to participate in work experience opportunities	No. LAC with work experience
You are supported by carers and have all necessary information about different options available	No. LAC with allocated connexions advisor.
You are provided with books and equipment you need to do work/ complete studies	Children's feedback Placement Feedback
Someone is available to you to offer support and advice especially financial advice	Children's feedback Placement Feedback
Make sure you have opportunities to be involved in activities you enjoy and help build your confidence	Children's feedback Placement Feedback
You are able to have driving lessons where appropriate and necessary	No. Care leavers with driving licence

How will we know?

6 Family and friends	
Aim	How we will know
Your view about family and friends are listened to and taken seriously, particularly about how, when and where you have contact with family	Participation in reviews Children's feedback
If you can't have contact for whatever reason we will make sure you are told why and understand the reasons for this	Children's feedback
Your social worker gives you news about family on regular basis where possible	Children's feedback
You are able to keep in contact with your friends whilst in care	Children's feedback
You can invite friends back to where I am living and stay overnight with their family where appropriate	No. overnight stays Children's feedback

How will we know?

7 Health and wellbeing	
Aim	How we will know
Support you by providing access to specialist health services if you need them	Children with up to date health assessment Children with timely health assessments
Provide a trusted person who you can talk to	Feedback from Children
Arrange for you to be cared for by individuals who are able to support you to be healthy and provide information where necessary	Placement stability Residential graded good or better Children's feedback
Register you with a GP and local dentist	% LAC registered with G.P % LAC registered with dentist
Provide you with access to regular health and dental assessments/ checks	Children with up to date health assessment Children with timely health assessments Children with up to date dental check
Make sure you have opportunities to be involved in activities you enjoy and help build your confidence	Children's feedback