

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025

Our promise to you

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FOREWORD BY PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The council's relationship with children we care for and care experienced young people is unlike any other relationship we have with people living in Walsall. We know that there is no greater responsibility than as a corporate parent. Because we are your 'Corporate Parents' we have legal and moral responsibilities towards you just like we have towards our own children. We need to be good parents and try to be the best possible parents we can be for you all.

We know that getting the best start in life is crucial as early experiences have lifelong impacts and shape our futures. We support all children we care for and care experienced young people to thrive and flourish; reach and exceed their potential and expand their life chances.

When it is time we help you leave our care to become resilient and independent adults. We have big ambitions for you and take a 'whole council' approach to caring for you and raising you, involving staff who work at the council, carers and Elected Members and our Partners alike.

We do this together, bringing together all of our resources and capacity so that we are able to achieve the best possible outcomes for you. We are passionate about doing the best for children we care for and care leavers and we want everyone connected to the council and all of our partners to share this passion.

We have identified priorities and actions to show how we plan to deliver on the promise. We understand that each child in our care is an individual and our approach reflects this. We are ambitious for every child in our care and will encourage them to achieve their full potential, by overcoming challenges to progress well in education, learning and training.

This document is all about the promise we have made to you, children in our care and care experienced young people which is based on your views. It is this promise that has shaped our vision and how we plan to meet our corporate parenting responsibilities.

For us, this is not just about fulfilling duties, but about ambition and aspiration. We value and care for you, not only through those who look after you on a daily basis but also through those who make decisions that affect your lives.

Councillor Elson, Chair of Corporate Parenting Board

Colleen Male Interim, Executive Director Children's Services

Introduction

Walsall's Corporate Parenting Board brings together all services and provides a welcoming forum for our children in care and care experienced young people to influence the shape of range of services available to them.

To secure the best possible outcomes we need the collective commitment from the whole Council, all elected members, council employees, as well as our partners - Health services, Police, Probation, Housing Providers, Schools and Colleges and voluntary sector. We all act as good parents, committing resources and working together to improve the lives of children in our care and care experienced young people. Alongside our corporate parenting principles, there are a number of priorities that underpin this strategy and the services that both ourselves and our partners provide children in our care and young people in our care.

This strategy outlines our priorities for supporting children in our care and sets a framework for the council and partners to be held accountable on their promises. Delivery against our commitments will be monitored diligently by the Corporate Parenting Board.

We know all children are unique and have individual needs and circumstances. We work closely with children in our care and care experienced young people and ensure that their 'Voice' is truly heard. Members will listen to young people and check that they are happy and healthy, receiving a quality education and have access to training and employment opportunities, as well as their own home to go to when the time comes to live independently.

Our relational approach means we engage directly and routinely with our children, their carers and care experienced young people as well as our staff who support them, encouraging them to share experiences so that we can better understand the issues they face and adapt services to meet their needs. Children's experiences will always form the centre of our approach in Walsall.

This means it is our responsibility as Corporate Parents to

- Keep our cared for children safe and secure, we stick with them and go the extra mile for them
- Create a culture where we know and believe in all our children and young people. We help them to achieve their goals and ambitions - by recognising their needs, talents and aspirations
- Listen and make our children and young people's ideas happen, ensure their lived experiences improve practice and make sure they know and understand their story and their plans
- Believe in our children and young people and help them to be the best they can be both now and, in the future
- Embrace and celebrate the individuality of our children and young people
- We want our children and young people to be healthy and happy
- We will listen to our children and young people's worries and work with them to find solutions
- We want our care experienced young people to become confident and resilient adults living within their own community with support from trusted adults

Children and Social Work Act 2017 – Corporate Parenting Principles

There are seven corporate parenting principles, which always guide our work

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- To help those children and young people gain access to, and make best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

How does Walsall compare Nationally?

	Nationally	West Midlands	Statistical neighbours	Locally
	at 31 March 2022			31 March 2023
Number of children we care for	82,170 70:10,000	88:10,000	100: 10,000	650 93.7:10,000.
Number of children living with foster families	70%	73%	74%	75%
Number of olds care experienced young people that we support.	33,590 19 - 21 year olds			236 18 -25 year olds
Percentage of care experienced young people In Touch (19 - 21-year-old)	92%	91%	95%	92%
Percentage of 19 -21 year old care experienced young people in education, employment or training	55%	52%	50%	54%

Our Promise to You - Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People:

Our Promise to You is a list of commitments developed with young people and children's services decision makers to ensure that our children in care and care experienced young people get the right services and support. Our 'Promises' form our Pledge to You as children in our care and care leavers. A pledge is important. It tells our Children and Young People what we promise to do for them as their Corporate Parents.



The Promise

Younger children 5 – 11 years

Sometimes children are not able to live with their parents and so they may need to be placed in our care. When this happens, there are a number of things that we will do to make sure that you are safe and well cared for. We call these our 'promises to you'.

Education



- We promise to help you to play and learn at a school that is right for you
- We will help you join clubs and after school activities near to where you live
- We will help you to make friends
- We will tell you how well you are doing and let you know how proud we are of you

Keeping you safe



- We promise to make sure you live somewhere safe where there will always be someone to take care of you
- We will make sure you can keep things that are important to you like your favourite toys.
- We will make sure you always have someone that you can talk to when you are feeling sad
- We will listen to what you like and don't like

Keeping you healthy



- We will make sure you stay well and can see a Doctor when you are poorly
- We will help you to eat healthy food and drinks that will make you grow big and strong
- We will help you to be happy and feel good about yourself
- We will help you to play safely outside and enjoy exercise

Keeping in touch



- We promise to help you to understand the reason why you are in care and will keep a story of your life for you to look at
- We promise to help you keep in touch with your family and friends, if it is safe to do so.
- We will help you stay in touch with Foster Carers and friends if you want to and will tell you if this can't happen
- We will make sure that you have a social worker that you can talk to

The Promise

Older children
12 - 15 years



Every child in our care will be treated fairly and respected as individuals. We will always seek to do everything we can to support and inspire you to be the best you can be. Through everything we do, we will help you to develop strong and meaningful relationships with your family, friends, carers, teachers and social workers so that you are given the very best support available.

Education and Training



- We promise to make sure that you have the best education possible and help you to plan for your future
- We promise to help you to enjoy new experiences and develop your own interests and hobbies
- We promise to celebrate your achievements and tell you how proud we are of you
- We promise to try and make sure that you don't have to change school
- We promise to make sure that you get all the help and support you need to learn, achieve and succeed

Keeping you safe



- We promise to provide you with a safe and comfortable place to live
- We promise to listen to you and involve you in decisions that affect your life.
- We promise to help you feel safe, both in and out of your home.
- We promise to encourage and support you to express your views
- We promise to provide you with a trusted adult that can help you if you are feeling worried
- We promise not to do anything that will make you stand out as a child in care

Keeping you healthy



- We promise to support and encourage you to have a healthy lifestyle
- We promise to make sure you are cared for by people who can keep you safe and healthy and will teach you how to learn to look after yourself as you get older.
- We promise to help you to access a range of leisure activities
- We promise to listen to any health issues you may have and will help you to get the support you need

Keeping in touch



- We promise to help you to understand the reason why you are in care
- We promise to help you keep in touch with your family and friends, if it is safe to do so.
- We promise to respect you as individuals and listen to what you want
- We promise to help you keep a record of important events, achievements and people in your life that are important to you
- We promise to help you take part in things you want to do such as school trips and fun activities



The Promise Older children and Care Leavers aged 16-25

By listening to our care experienced young people, we have developed a list of 'Promises' that form our Pledge to you as children in our care. A pledge is an important part of running a service for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. It tells Children and Young People what we promise to do for them as their Corporate Parents.

Education, Training & Employment



- We promise to help you with your education and with finding the right employment and training opportunities.
- We promise to encourage and support you into college or university and give you clear information about the support you can expect.
- We promise to ensure that you have opportunities for work experience and employment such as apprenticeships and traineeships.
- We promise to support you to have different experiences and access to activities that may interest you

Keeping you safe



- We promise to help you to decide where you want to live and will help to keep you safe and comfortable
- We promise to help you to stay with your foster carers if this is possible.
- We promise to help you to manage your money and ensure you have financial stability ready for your future
- We promise to help you to get important documents like passports and driving licence
- We promise to pay for your council tax, even if you live outside of Walsall Council
- We promise to provide you with opportunities to build your confidence so that you are able to make your own decisions about your safety

Keeping you healthy



- We promise to help you to access health services and have access to your health passport
- We promise to go with you to health appointments and support you if you need it
- We promise to help you to access local leisure facilities to help you keep fit and well.
- We promise to make sure you have someone to talk to or can access support with your mental wellbeing

Keeping in touch



- We promise to help you to keep in contact with people that are important to you
- We promise to celebrate your achievements with you
- We promise to respect you as individuals and have high aspirations for your future
- We promise that you will always have someone to contact

Our priorities

Our priorities respond directly to Our Promises to You, a list of commitments to children and care leavers, developed and agreed by the young people themselves and endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board.

- Safety and Permanency
- Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing
- Education and Employment
- Transitions and Independence
- Influence and Involvement

Safety and Permanency

All of our children and young people will be safe from harm, with stability provided through secure homes and excellent carers.

Walsall works hard to ensure the right support is provided at the right time so that children can remain with their families. We always celebrate our family successes and we will support children to remain at home if it is safe to do so. However, if concerns about safety or wellbeing persist, swift action is taken to ensure the child has a safe and secure place to live, even if this means having to go into the care of the Local Authority.

We have a duty to ensure to ensure our young people have a safe place to stay. As corporate parents, we listen to and train our carers to have all the tools they need to be the best carers to our young people. We also understand the importance of support networks and make sure our young people have adults that they can rely on and provide as much stability as possible.

We know that uprooting children from their homes or having to change placements can be tough, so we work hard to find long and suitable families and homes for our young people that will allow them to flourish and make a success of their lives.

We commit to:

- Provide young people with a safe home to live with carer who are suitable and well trained. Young people will be happy and taken care of, and only moved again if absolutely necessary.
- Our Turning Point service will continue to make a direct contribution to helping children to remain with their families
- We will ensure that social work plans are child focused, culturally informed and consider the perspectives of partners in health and education.
- We will continue to help our children find stability, build trust with professionals and identify risks early to avoid young people entering the criminal justice system.
- We will give our young people all the information we can about their new family, home and where they will be living. They will be given information about the support available from youth services, including on education, training and careers.
- Ensure continuity of care for our young people so that they maintain a sense of stability and do not experience too many different professionals.
- We'll draw on the rich experience of our foster carers and enable them to provide best possible care for looked after children and young people.
- We will continue to challenge ourselves to offer the best services and develop our approaches.
- Continuing to explore family and friends in order for children to return to family and not remain in care for longer than necessary if appropriate.
- Promote and champion the specific needs of unaccompanied and separated young people including support with acquiring citizenship.

Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing

We will educate our young people to encourage a happy and healthy lifestyle, making sure that professionals work together to ensure that all their health needs are met.

Often our children have had tough starts in life and many children and young people experience the trauma of being separated from their families and communities. Being happy and confident in identity is a key factor in looking after our mental wellbeing, particularly when it comes to race, sexuality, disability and gender. It's therefore crucial that we encourage our young people to be comfortable in who they are and demonstrate sensitivity and inclusivity of difference for our young people to thrive.

We are commit to:

- Care planning will consider the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our children and care leavers
- We will support our children and young people to understand the importance of their health assessments and ensure that no one misses out on healthcare, with regular assessments to help identify need.
- We'll encourage all young people to attend their assessments by offering flexible arrangements both face to face and virtual appointments. Medical appointments will be kept even if the young people live outside of Walsall.
- Provide a holistic health assessment within four weeks of a child entering care, and annually thereafter (or six-monthly for Under 5's). Our health team will listen to their problems and understand their needs, reviewing their physical health, growth and development.
- We will ensure and promote access to mental health services. For those with specific needs will be offered support from the FLASH Team for those who live within Walsall or within 20 miles. We will work with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or other providers to secure support.
- We will educate our young people and encourage a happy, healthy and active lifestyle, providing free access to leisure facilities. Maintaining an open dialogue about all aspects of their health; from healthy eating, exercising and staying safe, to sexual health, smoking, alcohol and substance misuse.
- We will support young people with substance misuse issues and intervene early to provide all the support they need.
- We will ensure that our children and young people know how to access their health records.
- We will ensure that the information about their health is kept confidential and only shared with people who need to know.

Education and Employment

We will champion our young people and help them succeed in education and training, supporting lifelong learning and the pursuit of their interests.

Ensuring that our children in care and care experienced young people are in good education, employment, apprenticeships and training will always be a priority for us as we know they offer the greatest opportunities for our young people to build a successful career.

All our young people are unique and have different interests and hobbies which provide opportunities to improve confidence, mental wellbeing and feel connected to something they love. In Walsall we maintain high aspirations for our young people and help them to make the most of their talents.

Walsall's Virtual School has high expectations and helps the children in our care and leaving our care to achieve the very best. Although the pupils attend many different schools and settings, we operate as if they all attend one school. We have high aspirations for their education, employment and training and we expect schools and settings to provide a quality learning environment which meets their needs and encourages and develops their ambition.

Virtual School monitors, supports and challenges academic achievements and attainment in partnership with schools, carers, social workers and personal advisers. We hold schools to account for the impact of the provision on pupil's progress through the education system using Personal Education Plans and monitoring the use of Pupil Premium plus .

The Virtual School is committed to ensuring that the Voice of the child will be reflected in our planning to effectively support all pupils and their views are sought at every Personal Education Plan meeting.

Virtual School deliver a variety of out of school activities throughout the year for children and young people of all ages. Some examples of the positive activities provided through the School are Summit2success Programme, Aspire to University and our Year 6 residential. We use pupil premium to fund sport, art and music activities and provide 1:1 tuition and other bespoke educational packages when needed. We celebrate the success of our children and young people through annual celebration events.

We have a Governing body, like any school, we provide reports on the work of the school and the progress and achievements of the children.

We commit to:

- Social workers and personal advisors working with our Virtual School, which ensures monitoring, support and advice for young people throughout the year.
- We'll help to ensure all children and young people achieve their full potential through education, training and good quality employment, making the most of their talents.
- We will identify any Special Education Needs (SEN) and meet these needs through an Education Health Care Plan or other SEN support, helping our young people overcome barriers to education attainment.
- Making sure they have a place at a good school or college and attend regularly.
- We will guarantee that every young person has access to digital devices, study resources, tuition and a high quality Personal Education Plan. They will also have excellent support from a Designated Teacher at their school.
- Ensuring our care experienced young people have a Pathway Plan that has clear information about what support is available once they leave care, go to university or undertake vocational training and apprenticeships. Also connecting them into training, coaching and other opportunities through *Endless Possibilities* and *Walsall Works*.

Transitions and Independence

Our young people will be prepared for the world of work and supported to become active citizens when they leave care. They will be prepared for independence in the best way possible.

Leaving care, like leaving home, is a critical transition for our young people and supporting them through this transition into adulthood is a major responsibility for us as corporate parents. This is not simply a matter of helping young people acquire a checklist of life and independent living skills – although it is those things – but also helping young people develop resilience, have a comfortable sense of self and have options for their futures. We recognise that young people mature at different paces and that some young people will struggle to gain independence and struggle in independence.

Working with our partners in health, education and CAMHS and Walsall Housing Group we are developing services so that young people remain living in the borough where they grew up with access to wrap around support while developing their independent living skills.

In Walsall we listen carefully to our care experienced young people and assess their needs to make sure they have all the services required for a successful transition into adult life. This includes making sure they have suitable accommodation while preparing for independence.

We commit to:

- Ensure that all young people in our care over the age of 16 years have a pathway plan specific to their needs and aspirations.
- We will make every effort to help young people remain living with their foster carer after 18 and up to the age of 21 if they wish (Staying Put)
- Once a young person leaves school, we will help them to make the most of their opportunities in training, further education and employment.
- From the age of 17, you will have a personal advisor to help them to become independent. Care experienced young people can continue with this support up until the age of 25 if they wish to do so.
- Care experienced young people will have the best housing and support offer we can give them. We want all our young people to live in our borough and have access to their communities
- We will ensure our care experienced young people are given as much help as possible to find suitable housing, supported to move and settle into their new home, with provisions made to ensure they're happy, safe and are able to sustain the tenancy.
- We will help our care experienced young people learn the practical skills needed to live independently, such as managing budgets and applying for jobs.
- We will ensure that individual needs are taken into account and the needs of young parents are supported through their transition.
- We will ensure that our care experienced young people know what their entitlements are and provide leaving care financial support, setting up home grant and other forms of financial relief (eg from council tax) in line with our financial assistance policies.
- We will ensure that all young people understand and have access to our local offer
- Young people will continue to receive advice as they gain independence; developing personal resilience as they journey into adulthood.
- Fully support any young person who wishes to pursue higher education to obtain places and apply for student loans. We will fund vacation accommodation for young people as necessary.
- Continue our work with further education colleges, employment training providers, Walsall Works and Endless Possibilities to help young people access high quality training and apprenticeships.
- Challenge ourselves and our partners to provide specific internship, apprenticeship and employment opportunities for our looked after young people and care leavers.

Influence and Involvement

Children and young people are at the heart of service design, delivery and evaluation

Children and young people's Voices must be at the centre of our approach to corporate parenting. We want mutually respectful and collaborative relationships with our children and young people. This means embedding a culture of fully involving young people in all matters affecting them, welcoming and encouraging their participation, actively listening to and genuinely taking account of their views.

The Children in Care Council (CICC) is a voice group for children in care and care experienced young people in Walsall. They meet every month to discuss what improvements need to be made to the support young people receive, particularly those in care or are care leavers. The CiCC meets and invites the Director of Children's Services, senior managers and Councillors to let them know what they are doing and ensure that young people are consulted on matters which affect their lives. The CiCC is regularly involved in decision making at various levels and hold decision makers to account. With the direct purpose of representing Walsall's children in care and care experienced young people the CiCC has had a clear and effective impact on the support that our children receive.

As Corporate Parents, we know that we cannot make effective decisions for young people and provide the support they need without their help, thoughts and views.

We commit to:

- An active Children in Care Council ensuring that the voices of children and young people is central to our work
- Appoint Care Ambassadors to strengthen the voices of children and young people
- We will ensure that children in care and care experienced young people participate in their planning and reviews
- We will ensure we learn from complaints received from young people
- We will ensure care experienced young people are engaged in their pathway planning and reviews
- Our independent reviewing officers will meet our children and young people
- We will enable access to advocacy

Leadership

Our Corporate Parenting Board will take lead responsibility for the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and action plan in each of the five key priorities.

The Board will:

- Be a forum for regular, planned and detailed discussion of thematic presentations
- Be a positive link with cared for children and care leaver forums
- Be a mechanism to listen to our cared for children and care leavers; to promote their voice and have influence in decision making
- Receive regular progress reports, service plans and performance reporting aligned to the corporate parenting action plan.
- Consider areas of good practice, developing services and make recommendations to support continued improvement and development
- Provide a governance structure for corporate parenting which provides strong challenge and scrutiny

How will we know that we are doing a good job!

We need to make sure that we do all the things that we have said we will do. Often this involves many people from different organisations across education, care and health and so it is important that we check in with each other. Sometimes we need to ask each other difficult questions, particularly if we think something is not working well or when something goes wrong?

The Corporate Parenting Board and elected members of the council will ask for updates about how well things are going. Corporate Parenting Board will bring together updates from our children in care council and our young people leaving care forum.

The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, Head of the Virtual School, Partners and managers will regularly offer to attend our children and young person meetings and may be 'called in' by the children to do so.

The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum will regularly be asked to think about the Promise and the ways in which services that help them have changed for the better. This information will be feedback to the Corporate Parenting Board will seek to ensure that current and future priorities, decisions and services will reflect the needs of cared for children and care leavers. The first question the Board will ask of themselves, is, "would this be good enough for my child?"

The Corporate Parenting Strategy will be monitored and evaluated by the Board through:

- Children and young people feel valued and able to shape and influence services
- Performance data will be provided to support and evidence progress on the five priorities
- Our audits telling us about the lived experience of children and young people
- Assurance reports for:
 - Annual Independent Reviewing Officer Report
 - Annual Fostering Report and Statement of Purpose
 - Annual Adoption Report
 - Annual Report of the Virtual School
- Annual health of Children in Care Assurance Report
- Improved placement stability and reduction in unplanned endings
- Placement Sufficiency Strategy and Action Plan
- Increased number of care experienced young people entering education, training or employment
- Review and revise our Local Offer for Care Experienced young people