

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 to 2025

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Progress against our 2017 priorities
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Terms:
Children Looked After (CLA)
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)
Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers: good

When children come into care, they receive a very good service. Staff at all levels work tirelessly to help children in care and care leavers to achieve in life and protect them from further harm. Children are matched carefully with carers who promote their needs and help them to achieve. Social workers and personal advisers (PAs) work steadfastly to advocate on behalf of care leavers to ensure that they receive the best support to move safely towards independence....Corporate leaders and elected members have tangible high aspirations, demonstrated by continuous financial support.

1. Introduction

Corporate parenting is the term used to describe the duties and responsibilities of a local authority in respect of the children looked after by the authority. Parental responsibility for looked after children is the responsibility of the whole council, not just children services. In addition the local authority should enrol the support of its partner agencies in helping them to fulfil their obligations in respect of their corporate parenting responsibilities for the children looked after by the council.

Corporate parenting relates to all children looked after by the authority, wherever they are placed, including young people receiving after care services up to 25 years of age.

Corporate parenting is about offering at least the same standards of care as would a 'reasonable parent' in respect of the children looked after by the council. The outcomes for children who have been looked after can be poor with the reasons which brought them into care such as abuse, neglect, separation, loss and rejection significantly affecting their subsequent life experiences. As adults; they are less likely to achieve educationally; they are over represented in the criminal justice system; often have poorer health outcomes including an increased risk of suffering from mental health difficulties; have an increased likelihood of becoming homeless and experience economic and relationships difficulties in their own families.

The goal of corporate parenting is to improve the life chances of children looked after – protecting their welfare, promoting their wellbeing, enhancing their lives and helping them reach their full potential. Everyone should have high aspirations for, and expectations of, children who are looked after and care leavers.

A key strand of corporate parenting is that it should be undertaken in consultation with children and young people who should have a say about how services for them are provided on both an individual and collective basis.

In addition to enrolling the support of all chief officers within the local authority and partner agencies such as police, probation, youth justice, connexions, health and schools, the local authority should harness the support and resources of local communities, sport and leisure facilities, business and faith groups.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 outlined 7 Corporate Parenting principles

- a) To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Looked After Children and Care Leavers
- b) To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- c) To take into account the views wishes and feelings of those young people

- d) To help those children and young people gain access to , and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- e) To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- f) For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- g) To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and Independent living

2. Our Vision

As corporate parents we are committed to ensuring that every child looked after and care leaver has the best possible start in life, is given help to achieve their potential and experience safe and positive parenting. We will provide the same standard of care as any good parent; we have high aspirations for our children and will be strong advocates for them.

- We want our children and young people to be happy and healthy, to be safe and protected from harm and sexual exploitation and be supported into adulthood.
- We want our children to have everything that good parents want for their children.
- We want our looked after children and young people to work with us, along with their parents and carers, in shaping how we manage and organise the planning, resources and services that support and care for them.
- We want them to achieve their potential especially in education, to make the most of the opportunities offered and to participate in the decisions affecting their care and their lives.
- We want our looked after children to be in placements that are as close as possible to their families where they feel safe, happy and taken care of.
- We want our looked after children and young people to be supported in maintaining their culture, religion and identity and to be supported to maximise the opportunities available to them.
- We want young people leaving care to be prepared for independent living, and supported to participate fully as active citizens into adulthood.
- 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.

3. Summary of Achievements to date

- Care experienced young people are part of every interview panel to recruit social workers, after care personal advisors and managers in the Children Looked After, UASC, and Leaving Care team (introduced in 2020)
- Council tax exemptions for all Harrow Care Leavers until their 25th birthday was introduced in April 2021.
- Harrow was one of the first local authorities in England to sign-up to the *Parents In and Leaving Care Charter*, focussing on support to care leavers who become parents
- The Harrow Local Offer to Care Leavers was refreshed following consultation with care experienced young people in 2021
- In 2021, we stayed in touch with 98% of care leavers aged 19-21, and 96% were in suitable accommodation
- 100% of eligible children have a completed Personal Education Plan (PEP) in 2021
- No child looked after by Harrow had a permanent exclusion in 2020-2021
- All children are given extra tuition according to their need
- The Staying Put policy enables care leavers to remain with their foster carers after their 18th birthday

4. The Foundations of our Strategy

Harrow Council is ambitious for looked after children and young people and our priority is to secure the very best care and opportunities for them. To achieve this we will work in partnership with children, young people, their families and partner agencies to ensure that children and young people enjoy their childhood and succeed in adult life. This commitment includes those care leavers for whom we have responsibility to support their transition into adulthood. This means that “children in care should be cared about, not just cared for”.

This strategy outlines our aspirations for looked after children and young people and sets out the actions we intend to take to achieve them. This strategy is part of a broad range of activity that supports our shared aim to improve provision for children in care and care leavers including:

- Our co-produced Pledge to Children in Care and Care leavers and a local offer for care leavers
- The Corporate Parenting Panel which provides strategic leadership to ensure the council is delivering its corporate parenting duties, and includes participation from care experienced young people
- Harrow Children Looked After Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2019 – 2024 that sets out how we will deliver the range and number of high-quality placements needed by children in care and care leavers
- Quarterly performance monitoring and evaluation
- Harrow Safeguarding Partnership Plan
- The Harrow Virtual School working with schools, colleges, training providers, education settings and children’s social care to improve educational outcomes for children in care and care leavers
- Harrow Youth Justice Plan which is addressing issues of disproportionality in the Youth Justice System and this involves strong partnership with local community groups and statutory partners
- Harrow Borough Plan 2030
- Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report
- Children and Young People’s engagement and feedback annual reports

5. Key Priorities

In order to achieve our vision to be good corporate parents we commit to the following 4 priorities for 2022-2025.

5.1 Education, Training and Employment: We have high aspirations and want to close the attainment gap for children in care. We will increase the proportion of care leavers in education, training and employment.

There are many different pathways for learning and we have high aspirations for our children and young people to achieve. We will work in partnership to provide a range of quality education and employment settings to help them develop confidence and skills for their future.

The role of Harrow Virtual School is to raise the attainment and outcomes of Harrow’s Children Looked After (CLA). The Virtual School do this by challenging and supporting the schools, as well as providing a support service to a number of stakeholders in order to ensure that all Harrow Children Looked After and Care Leavers receive a high standard of education and are involved in appropriate educational activities. The Virtual School focus their work on raising the aspirations of young people and relevant professionals so that they

can reach their potential and move forward into further and higher education and gainful employment. The Virtual School Headteacher Annual Report informs the corporate parenting agenda regarding children's educational attainment, school attendance, employment and training, to accelerate progress to Narrow the Gap.

We will:

- Implement catch-up interventions to support children who have fallen behind with their learning.
- Work to increase the number of children with good school attendance from 90% to 95% or higher.
- Aim to increase the Attainment 8 Score (18) to be in line with or above the England Average (21).
- Review education packages for 'hard to reach' Key Stage 3 and Key 4 students.
- Address issues of disproportionality of education outcomes: Black and Asian boys have been identified as a vulnerable group and represent 57% of the cohort with a suspension. Further interventions to be explored for all pupils at risk of receiving a suspension.
- Work with partners such as Prospects, Xcite and Catch 22 to support young people into training and employment, and promote apprenticeships for care leavers
- Hold a monthly NEET panel to develop targeted plans to support young people back into education, employment or training and to develop their aspirations

5.2 Improve the involvement and participation of young people in all services for children looked after and care leavers, with a focus on co-production, service design, delivery and evaluation.

We recognise that care experienced children and young people are experts by experience and we must learn from and listen to them. Since 2020, care experienced young people have been members of all interview panels for staff recruitment in the CLA, UASC and Leaving Care Team. Care experienced young people are invited and supported to attend every Corporate Parenting Panel to share their experiences with members and provide honest feedback about service delivery. Independent Reviewing Officers consults with children looked after two weeks prior to their statutory review. Young people are supported by their placements, carers, social worker, advocates or the Children's Participation Co-ordinator. However, we know we can and must do more to involve care experienced children and young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of services.

We will:

- Co-facilitate a series of consultation events in 2022 to revitalise the Children in Care Council, seeking children and young peoples' views about what a council should look like, how it should be run, and how this will influence decisions and policies in Harrow Council
- Work with care experienced young people to undertake a Youth Led Inspection of Children's Services to develop more meaningful co-production and participation of services which meet the needs of children and young people.
- Ensure care experienced young people continue to be part of every interview panel in the CLA, UASC, and Leaving Care Team recruitment
- Continue to regularly seek the feedback of children looked after before CLA reviews and in plans and decisions made about their care and Pathway Planning.

5.3 Children looked after will be happy and healthy, safe and protected from harm and sexual exploitation: improve the physical, emotional and social health and wellbeing of children looked after and care leavers

Children Looked After are the responsibility of the local authority in the same way as we are responsible for our own children. Adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) can impact significantly on the short- and long-term health and well-being of our children in care and care leavers. Care experienced children and young people need to be able to easily access the services available, as well as making use of specialist services where necessary.

We will:

- Ensure children and young people have timely access to the right assessments (including Education Health and Care Plans where eligible), so their needs are understood and met.
- Ensure that young people know how to access their health information via the NHS app
- Commission services in partnership with children and young people to meet their needs, including emotional and mental health services (such as Heads Up)
- Advocate for children and care leavers to have priority access to health services
- Work with health partners to ensure the safe transition of young people to adult services
- Promote healthy relationships, sexual health and well-being, and support young people to access key agencies such as the Caryl Thomas Clinic, Brook, the Wish Centre, and Compass

5.4 Safe and stable homes: we will provide a choice of good quality placements that provide security, stability, safety and high standards of care

As corporate parents it is imperative that we commission the right accommodation and support services available so we can achieve the best outcomes for every child and young person. Harrow has a Placement Sufficiency Strategy which outlines the needs of children looked after and care leavers and how we ensure we commission and review a wide range of placement options to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers.

We will:

- Ensure that all children looked after are placed in appropriate homes with access to the support that they need, as identified in their care plan
- Develop a wide range of resources to respond to the diverse needs of children looked after and care leavers, working closely with education, health and housing services.
- Place children within Harrow as far as possible or within the North West London, except where this is not consistent with the child's welfare of a child
- Maintain joint working arrangements between Children and Housing to meet the needs of those who are at risk of becoming looked after at the age of 16 and 17 as a result of homelessness
- Continue to develop a sufficient range of accommodation and support packages for care leavers to facilitate their pathway plans and to ensure all transitions are undertaken in a planned and supportive manner. This includes a clear staying put policy to enable care leavers to remain with their foster carers up to the age of 25 if desired and appropriate
- Maintain robust systems to ensure careful matching of placements and to prevent disruption and to ensure placement stability

Appendix A: Progress against the 7 Corporate Parenting Priorities we set out in 2017

Strategic Objective	What's been working well	The challenges that remain
<p><i>1. Improve the education attainment and school attendance of looked after children; narrow the gap with other children</i></p>	<p>In academic year 2020-2021:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEP returns remain at 100%. • 95% of students attend schools which are Ofsted rated as 'Good' or better. • 78% of eligible children attended school • 8% of students had a suspension • No child had a permanent exclusion • 23% of students have an EHCP. • English Proficiency Programmes, 1:1 tuition, EAL Summer Camp are in place to support our most vulnerable groups. • Reception: 60% of pupils achieved 'good level of development' in Early Years' Assessments. The England average 48%. • Key Stage 1: 67% of pupils achieved 'expected standards' in Writing, Reading and Maths. The England average: 52%-Reading, 49% Maths and 42% for Writing • Key Stage 2: 67% of pupils achieved 'greater depth' in Reading. The England average is 12%. • 67% of pupils achieved 'expected standards' in Writing. The England average is 50%. 33% of pupils achieved 'expected standards' in Maths. The England average is 51%. • Key Stage 3: 30% EHCP, 30% have English as an Additional Language (EAL) and 40% are known to the Youth Offending Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch-up interventions to support children who have fallen behind with their learning due to impact of Covid-19 • To increase the number of children with good school attendance from 90% to 95% or higher. • To increase the Attainment 8 Score (18) to be in line with or above the England Average (21). • To review education packages for 'hard to reach' Key Stage 3 and Key 4 students. • Black and Asian boys have been identified as a vulnerable group and represent 57% of the cohort with a suspension. Further interventions to be explored for all pupils at risk of receiving a suspension. • Covid-19 has impacted particularly on NEET for care leavers, and a monthly problem solving panel for NEET young people will commence in 2022 to ensure young people are supported into education, employment and training opportunities

	<p>(YOT). One student received 11 GCSEs grades 4-8; Four students achieved GCSE passes (1-8) in both English and Maths.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Designated Teachers Network provides training and support is provided to teachers and DSLs in Harrow and to develop specialist knowledge in meeting the educational needs of children in care. 	
<p><i>2. Improve the involvement and participation of young people in all services for children looked after and care leavers</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care experienced young people are part of every interview panel to recruit social workers, after care personal advisors and managers in the Children Looked After, UASC, and Leaving Care team (introduced in 2020) Care experienced young people were involved in the local offer refresh in 2021, and this introduced Council tax exemptions for all Harrow Care Leavers until their 25th birthday from April 2021. Since 2020, Care experienced young people have joined the Corporate Parenting Panel to share their views and experiences of being looked-after by Harrow with elected members. In 2021, Harrow was one of the first local authorities in England to sign-up to the <i>Parents In and Leaving Care Charter</i>, focussing on support to care leavers who become parents The Independent Reviewing Officer consults with children looked after two weeks prior to their statutory review. Young people are supported by their 	<p>The prolonged impact of Covid-19 on social gatherings and group activities has impacted on the capacity to safely run groups and activities for children in care and care leavers.</p> <p>In 2022, care experienced young people will be consulted about their views and wishes for the Children in Care Council, Beyond Limits, and the Care Leavers Forum.</p> <p>Care experienced young people will be consulted and recruited to undertake a Youth Led Inspection of Children's Services to develop more meaningful co-production and participation of services which meet the needs of children and young people.</p>

	placements, carers, social worker, advocates or the Children's Participation Co-ordinator	
<p><i>3. Children looked after will be happy and healthy, safe and protected from harm and sexual exploitation: improve the physical, emotional and social health and wellbeing of children looked after and care leavers</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The % of children with up to date health checks and dental checks remains consistently better than our statistical neighbours and the England average • The percentage of CLA identified as having a substance misuse problem was 6.9% in 2020/21. This figure is similar to the previous reporting year and the London average. • The percentage of CLA whose immunisations were up to date was 82.2% in Harrow for the year 2020/2021, (80% in London) • There are well established processes and effective multiagency partnerships to identify and address exploitation and abuse of children. • Monthly meetings between social care, health and commissioners to review and meet the mental health needs of CLA and care leavers, and to ensure appropriate services are commissioned to meet the needs of children and young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing timely assessments for some children remains a challenge – and some assessments are needed to unlock support to young people and adolescents • Care experienced children and young people need priority access to services • Care leavers need more support to be confident in accessing their health history / health passport
<p><i>4. Safe and stable placements: provide a choice of good quality placements that provide security, stability, safety and high standards of care</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harrow's Placement Sufficiency Strategy and our involvement in the Commissioning Alliance framework ensure we have a range of placement options for children and care leavers. • The majority of children (78%) are placed within 20 miles of Harrow, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The numbers of children in care is growing nationally, and this is putting pressure on placement availability and planning • There is a national shortage of suitable placements to meet the needs of adolescents who have experienced abuse and exploitation

	<p>unless there are clear safety, welfare and matching reasons for children to be placed out of area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Housing services have robust joint working protocols to meet the needs of those who are at risk of becoming looked after at the age of 16 and 17 as a result of homelessness • Over 70% of children remain in their stable placement for over 2 years. 	
<p><i>5. Identity: looked after children know who they are and why they are looked after; feel valued and respected by others and their individual needs arising from gender, race, culture, disability, sexuality and religion are understood and met</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are supported with lifestory work to understand the reasons why they became looked after, and care plans and pathway plans are written in age appropriate language • Placement decisions are made on the needs of the child, including identity needs, and children are supported to pursue their interests and aspirations • We ensure the work force reflects the diversity of the local community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We continue to recruit social workers and foster carers that reflect the diversity of the local community
<p><i>6. Smooth transition to adulthood and independence: ensure children looked after and care leavers receive focused support at key transition points in their lives</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2021, we stayed in touch with 98% of care leavers aged 19-21, and 96% were in suitable accommodation • The Staying Put policy enables care leavers to remain with their foster carers after their 18th birthday • Following a service redesign completed in 2021, a single team is responsible for children looked after (including unaccompanied asylum seeking children "UASCs") and care leavers. This has enabled more consistent decision making, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>New Belongings Self Assessment</i> will be completed in 2022 to assess the service against 10 areas which reflect young people's pathways to adulthood (Stein, 2012) and what might be expected in a 'gold standard' service to care leavers

	<p>pathway plans and the removal of a “cliff edge” at 18, as care leavers do not automatically move to a new worker.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We are one of the first Local Authorities in England to sign the Charter for Parents in and leaving care. As corporate parents we are committed to supporting mothers and fathers who are in care, or in the process of leaving care	
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Appendix B: Corporate Parenting Pledge¹ to Looked After Children

For a better future

Harrow Council provides care and support to those children and young people who, for whatever reason, cannot live with their birth family. For some this may be a short time and for others it may be longer. However long or whether you live with foster carers, residential care, adoptive parents or another member of your family we are committed to giving you the best start in life possible - helping you to be the best that you can be.

The Local Authority is your corporate parent - which simply means trying to do everything that a good parent does throughout your time in our care. Our commitment to you is made by the politicians, who represent the community in the running of the council, all directors and senior managers and our staff, who provide care and support for you.

Children and young people who are in our care or who have been in our care in the recent past have told us what kind of good care and support they need to be the best they can be. We have listened to this and the commitments we make in this children's pledge reflect this.

Our pledge

We pledge to work together to provide you the best possible care and support to help you be the best you can be in your life - now and in the future. To do this we will:

1. **Provide you with a safe home to live where you feel happy and taken care of.** This means that wherever possible you will have a choice about where you live and that you will not be moved from a settled home unless absolutely necessary, or if it is deemed to be in your best interests.
2. **Provide you with the support you need to do well in education.** This means that we will make sure you have the opportunity to go to a school where you can flourish, get the support outside of school to do well in exams and have access to college and university.
3. **Listen to you about things in your own life and about the care that you receive from us.** This means that we will always make sure that you are involved in decisions that are made about your own life and that we find ways to help you tell us your views if you find this difficult. We will also make sure that there are opportunities to tell us what you think about the care that you receive and that if you have a complaint you get the help to get heard.
4. **Be honest with you about things that have happened in your life and the decisions that are made about your care.** We know that at times it is difficult to understand what has happened to you and why certain decisions are made about your care. We can't promise that you will always agree with these decisions. But, we will always be honest with you about the reasons for these decisions and, where possible, what has happened in your life.
5. **Help you to develop good relationships with the people that you care for and the people in your life that are most important to you.** This means that, as far as possible, we will provide you with opportunities to see those people that are important to you in your life. We will help you to develop and maintain relationships and friendships with the people that provide care and support for you and other children and young people.
6. **Provide you with support and opportunities to enjoy your life and have interests and hobbies of your own.** This means that we will make sure you have information and access to opportunities and activities outside of education that you enjoy.
7. **Provide you with the support you need when you leave care to become independent and be the best you can be in adult life.** This means that we will make sure that you have choices about how and when you leave care and that we will make

¹ <https://www.harrow.gov.uk/childrens-social-care/harrows-pledge-children-care>

sure we support you to be prepared for independence and have the help you will need to make independence work when you leave care.

We make these pledges to you and will do our best to always fulfil each one. There are many teams involved in helping make these pledges happen - from Children's Services to Housing and Health. We will make sure that we work together to do this.

Harrow Council - Corporate Parenting Panel

The Harrow Pledge is endorsed by the Corporate Parenting panel on behalf of the Council.

All policy and procedures relating to children looked after are overseen by the Corporate Parenting panel.

Members and senior officers from the Council meet to discuss the performance, service delivery and aspirations for the Council in respect of Children Looked After and young people leaving care. Care experienced young people also attend the Corporate Parenting panel.

This panel is lead by members to challenge, scrutinise and support the services for children looked after.