

# Hertfordshire's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019 – 2022

*"I want all children to have the brightest future possible. I will advocate for positive change for all children and particularly those who are most disadvantaged."*

Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner for England

## Foreword

Hertfordshire's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019-2022 sets out the vision and plans for fulfilling the ambitions and corporate parenting responsibilities to all our children and young people in care and care leavers.

This strategy has taken account of what children and young people have told us about their experiences of being in our care, as well as linking with the key priorities of **Hertfordshire's Children Looked After Strategy**.

The Children in Care Council (CHICC) has a strong voice representing children and young people and works hard to tell us what needs to change, providing ideas and advice about how best to do this. The County Council highly values the experiences of children and young people in care and we are committed to involving them in all decisions that affect their lives. We do this by asking what they want, listening to what they tell us and taking action. Hertfordshire's Pledge to children and young people looked after and care leavers is based on the Children's Services Outcome Bees Framework. The new framework aims to ensure that there is a shared vision and clear objectives for children, young people and their families in Hertfordshire.

This framework informs the core principles of this Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Children looked after and care leavers can face challenges as they grow up and move on to independence. In order to make this journey as smooth as possible and to ensure they go on to fulfil their potential, it is vital that Members, Officers and Services across the Council work together in their interests. This strategy sets out how Hertfordshire intends to fulfil its corporate parenting responsibilities in a way that puts children and young people at the centre of improvements in the planning, delivery and evaluation of our services.



**Teresa Heritage**

Executive Member for Children, Young People  
and Families

**Jenny Coles**

Director of Children's Services

## Introduction

### What is Corporate Parenting?

'Corporate Parenting' is the term used to refer to the collective responsibility of the Council to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are 'Looked After', that is, children and young people for whom the authority has, or shares, parental responsibility, or for whom the Authority provides care and accommodation on behalf of their parent. Many Children Looked After (CLA) have suffered abuse or neglect prior to coming into care and it is important that this is addressed whilst they are kept safe and their education, health and care needs are met.

The Authority also has a duty and responsibility towards care leavers aged 16 to 25 years.

### What are the Legal Duties?

This collective responsibility was first laid out in the Children Act 1989. Government guidance for Councillors, *'If this were my child'* (DfES 2003), emphasised their role in ensuring that all CLA receive a good standard of care and the high-quality outcomes that every parent would want for their own child are sought.

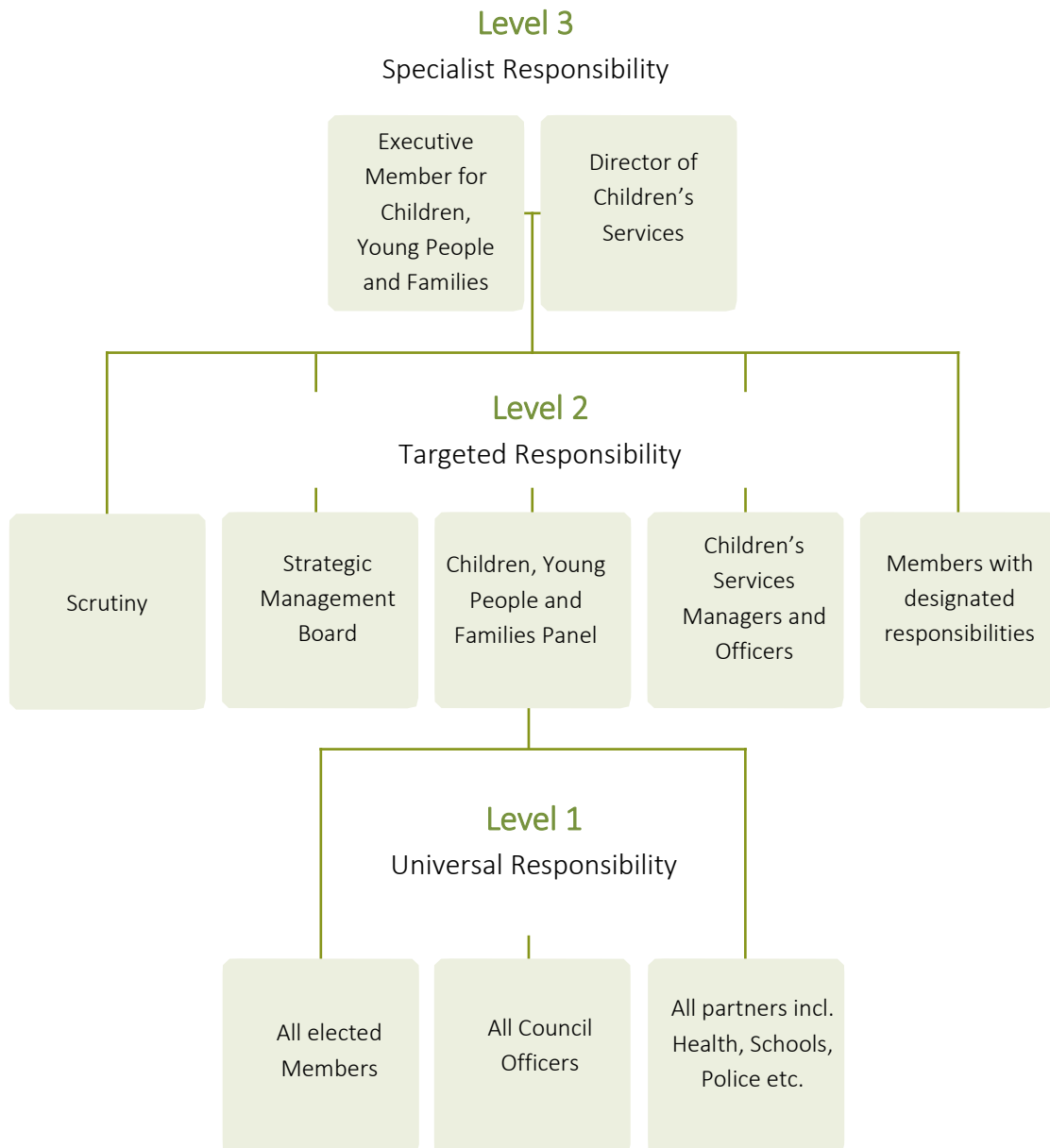
The Children and Social Work Act 2017 outlined the seven key corporate parenting principles which local authorities should have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people. These are:

1. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
2. to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
3. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
4. 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
5. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
6. for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
7. to prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living

As well as local authority responsibilities towards CLA, the Children Act 1989 placed a duty on partners including Health, Education and Housing services to assist Children's Services to fulfil their functions under the Act – providing help, support and services in order to meet Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

## Who are Corporate Parents?

The publication *'Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice'* (National Children's Bureau 2008) identifies three levels of understanding and responsibility in relation to Corporate Parenting which remain relevant:



## The Three Levels of Corporate Parenting Responsibility

### Level 1 - Universal Responsibility

This is the minimum standard which requires all elected members and officers within the Council and other partner agencies to have an understanding of:

- the needs of our CLA and why they need to be looked after
- the profile of CLA and the outcomes they are achieving compared with other local children
- their responsibility for promoting the welfare of CLA and care leavers

Elected members and officers should:

- be sure we are providing the best possible care for our CLA and care leavers asking, 'would it be good enough for our children?'
- be aware of and, where relevant, implement 'the pledge' to CLA and care leavers
- know what is most important to our children and young people in care and care leavers

### Level 2 - Targeted Responsibility

This standard relates to elected members who are members of the Children's Services' Panel, members with designated corporate parenting responsibilities (visit children's homes, sit on Fostering or Adoption Panels) and members who carry out Corporate Parenting responsibilities through fulfilling a scrutiny function. It requires that they:

- are aware of relevant issues and know the expectations regarding services for children in care and care leavers
- have access to qualitative and quantitative information about services and outcomes for children and young people and are able to evaluate this information
- consider how they are going to hear the voice of the child / young person and take action, in conjunction with managers and other agencies, to improve services
- ensure, with senior managers across the council and its partner agencies, that improving outcomes for this group of children is a consideration in all decision making
- ensure the Council and partner agencies work together to improve the service and respond to changing needs
- know what our CLA and care leavers think of the services provided for them.

### Level 3 - Specialist Responsibility

This specialist responsibility is for key senior roles within the Council - the Executive Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services. In addition to the responsibilities detailed previously, they will:

- provide systematic leadership across the authority in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of CLA and care leavers
- ensure arrangements are in place to implement any key policy decisions in this regard
- ensure that there is an in-depth understanding of the needs of the Council's CLA and care leavers and that this informs service improvement

- ensure that effective governance arrangements are in place to implement any decisions regarding CLA and care leavers across the partnership
- ensure that the strategic plans of Children’s Services and joint plans with partner agencies meet the needs of CLA and care leavers
- ensure there are strong links with the Children in Care Council (CHICC) and that they are supported to be effective.

Elected members set the strategic direction for services provided by the Council, as well as the allocation of resources. It is imperative that they use their influence to ensure the needs of CLA and care leavers are met, taking any action needed to address gaps in service and consistently work to improve outcomes.

**Anne Longfield, Children’s Minister, wrote in ‘Delivering a Care Leavers’ Strategy for Traineeships and Apprenticeships 2016’:**

*“I spend much of my time talking to young people who are in – or who have recently left – care. Too often, I hear the same story on repeat. A troubled family life, a disrupted time in care, too little advice on life outside the care system, and too few opportunities. The young people I meet all want the same thing that other young people want: a stable home, a loving family, and a job. We have a duty to help them build these foundations”.*



Members of the CHICC Deputies and Care Leavers Group



## The aims of Corporate Parenting

We are committed to ensuring that children looked after by Hertfordshire are able to enjoy a childhood where they are safe, well cared for and supported to achieve their full potential.

We will achieve this by:

- acting in the best interests of our children and young people and promoting their physical and mental health wellbeing
- encouraging our children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings and taking these into account
- supporting our children and young people to access and make the best use of services provided by Hertfordshire county council and our partners
- promoting high aspirations for our children and young people, seeking to secure the best outcomes for them
- ensuring our children and young people are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- preparing our children and young people for adulthood and independent living

## Framing the new Strategy

The refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy has aligned with Hertfordshire's Children's Services Outcome Bee framework to ensure that there is a shared vision for looked after children and care leavers:



These themes have been used to frame the updated Pledge to Children Looked After and Care Leavers which can be found at [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/chicc](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/chicc)



## What our children said

The table below shows a series of comments made by young people when asked what each bee means to them, and what we as Corporate Parents pledge to do for Hertfordshire’s children in care and care leavers.




Our full Pledge to children and young people in our care can be found at the following link:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/in-care/rights-responsibilities-and-entitlements/our-pledge.aspx>

Our full Care Leavers Pledge can be found at the following link:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/in-care/rights-responsibilities-and-entitlements/our-pledge.aspx>

Alternative versions of both Pledges are also available on request.

	<p><i>“The whole point of being in care is to keep us safe.”</i></p> <p>We will protect our children and young people to keep them safe and settled</p>
	<p><i>“Sometimes our health gets overlooked, especially when times are chaotic. Our health and wellbeing is important to us and should be important to you.”</i></p> <p>We will support our children and young people to be as healthy and well (physically and mentally) as they can be</p>
	<p><i>“Education is one of the most important things that affects the rest of our lives.”</i></p> <p>We will support our children and young people with education, training and employment to help them achieve to the best of their ability</p>



*“As Children in Care we have all had a traumatic experience, knowing where we come from and having a good support network around us for when we leave care is important.”*

We will help our children develop self-confidence and the skills to deal with life’s challenges



*“Support with independence should start when you come into care, not just when you leave.”*

We will help prepare our children and young people for independence and adulthood



*“Being supported to take part in any activities we wish to, helps us to Be Happy.”*

We will make sure our children and young people have a sense of purpose and are part of a family and their community

## Corporate Parenting Board

Our Corporate Parenting Board meets quarterly to report back on the ways in which the Outcome Bees are being delivered in Hertfordshire to improve the lives of children and young people in care and care leavers. They also undertake deep dives into specific parts of Children's Services.

The Board has responsibility for ensuring that we, as a whole Council, are delivering the corporate parenting agenda. Membership includes the Lead Member for Children's Services, Operations Director for Specialist Services, a range of Heads of Service from across Children's Services, representatives from the Virtual School, Health and colleagues in our Clinical Commissioning Groups.

*A list of members can be found at:*

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/in-care/corporate-parenting-board.aspx>

Each outcome domain is looked at by two of our board members who are required to provide progress reports to the Board on:

- what work is underway
- what successes have been achieved, and
- any challenges faced.

The Children, Young People and Families Cabinet Panel also monitors how the corporate parenting agenda is being upheld and delivered in Hertfordshire. This committee consists of elected members a full list of which can be found at:

<https://democracy.hertfordshire.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=219>