



BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST

Corporate Parenting

Annual Report

10th July 2019



Introduction

Corporate Parenting is the collective responsibility of the Council, its elected members, employees, and partner agencies, to provide the best possible care and opportunities for the children and young people who are or have been in the care of the Local Authority.

Children who have been in care are more likely to have poor educational outcomes, suffer from mental ill health and are less likely to be in employment, education and training. They are also more likely to be in the criminal justice system, experience homelessness and struggle to maintain stable personal relationships. It is therefore important for the council, partners, and the city as a whole that we work collectively to guide and support these young people – raising their aspirations and providing training and employment opportunities whilst working together to improve outcomes. It is our duty to support these young people to become happy, healthy and productive citizens of our city.

What we do for our children and young people in, and leaving, care, must be subject to this simple test:

Is this good enough for my child?

This annual report will set out the progress we have made, as corporate parents, against the 12 promises made and agreed with our Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum.

- Promise 1: We'll involve you in decisions that affect you and listen to your views.
- Promise 2: We'll try really hard to find the best possible place for you to live.
- Promise 3: We'll make sure that you have every opportunity possible to do well at school.
- Promise 4: We'll support you to do the things you enjoy and encourage you to take part in a wide range of activities, so that your talents, hobbies and interests are met.
- Promise 5: We'll take care of your health and encourage you to be healthy.
- Promise 6: We'll give you a good and clear assessment of your needs and an up-to-date care plan.
- Promise 7: We'll make sure you have your own social worker, who visits you regularly and gives you details about how to contact them (or someone else if they're away) when you need them.
- Promise 8: We'll help you stay in touch with your family, friends and anyone else who's important to you.
- Promise 9: We'll listen to what you have to say.



Promise 10: We'll work with you and give you all the help and support you need to move successfully from care to adult life.

Promise 1: We'll involve you in decisions that affect you and listen to your views.

It is critical for children who are in care to have a social worker who listens to them and involves them within care planning decisions.

We know from the OFSTED inspection in December 2018 that the voice of the child is often well represented across the Trust and social work practice, which is an encouraging sign that children are routinely engaged in decisions made about them. OFSTED identified that most children in care enjoy timely support and frequent visits from social workers who know them well. The voice of children in care is given high priority and is consistently well considered by social workers. Children are therefore seen regularly and are seen alone by their social workers. This means that children are able to develop meaningful and trusting relationships with their social workers.

Children are actively encouraged to be involved in their child in care reviews and currently 98% formally participate in the review process. Young people report positively on the availability of independent reviewing officers (IROs) and described sustained and positive relationships with them.

Internal quality evaluation work across the Children's Trust has identified good examples of children and young people contributing to their care planning through direct work however, this is inconsistent and needs to be more widespread across practice.

Key Messages

- We will maintain and deepen engagement with young people working with the Trust
- Representatives of children in care and care leavers will continue to interview all senior applicants for appointments in the Trust
- The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum will be encouraged to lobby for improvements and changes in policy and practice that make us better corporate parents
- We will continue to ensure individual involvement, in care plans, reviews and in all decisions affecting young people's lives in, and leaving, care



Promise 2: We'll try really hard to find the best possible place for you to live.

Children and young people say that when they are cared for by the local authority they would want to remain close to their community. 32% of children in care currently live out of the city. While this is a better proportion than England averages, we need to do more. Through better commissioning and market management of residential provision and increasing the number of foster placement available across Birmingham, we aim to provide more homes for children within the city.

An indication of how settled young people are in placement is how often they go missing. Over the last 12 months, 7% of children went missing from their placement, which is lower than both England averages and statistical neighbour averages of 11%. While this is a positive indication, only 53% of those children who go missing are offered a return interview. This needs to improve so that we can better understand the reasons why children go missing from placement and then take action accordingly.

It is important that children in care are settled and stable as this contributes to better outcomes. Currently 68% of children have lived within the same placement for over 2 1/2 years. This is better than the England average of 67%.

Currently 11% of young people over the last 12 months have experienced 3 or more placements; this is in line with the England Averages.

We know that only 4% of children in care are placed within their wider family and friends network. This is a very low figure, and we want more children to find permanency within these networks as we know that this is what children want and very often achieves better and more sustainable outcomes.

More children need to achieve permanency through adoption. Currently only 4% of children in care become adopted. This is less than the national average of 5%. We need to recruit more adoption placements to make sure that all children who should find permanency through adoption do achieve this outcome.

When children are placed for adoption performance is improving and children are reaching permanency more quickly. Over the last 12 months the average time from coming into care to being placed with their adoptive carer is 477 days. This has fallen from an average of 688 days. However, 477 days is still too high and not meeting the DfE target of 426 days.

When children in foster care reach 18 there is now provision within law for them to remain in this foster placement, funded by the council in a "Staying Put" arrangement.



For homeless young people who are 16 and 17 years the Council is providing a strong offer. This was identified by OFSTED in January 2019 who stated young people “receive swift and well targeted support that includes a wide range of suitable accommodation options, this is supported by effective assessments and often tenacious and skilful work to engage young people”.

Key Messages

- We need to continue to drive adoptive carer recruitment to make sure every child who needs a plan of adoption achieves this outcome.
- We want to increase the number of children who stay put within their foster placement.
- When young people are leaving care and applying for housing they say that they would benefit from a more personalised response from the housing department, rather than the current automated bidding process. We will need to consider ways in which a more sensitive and bespoke support offer can be made.
- We need to strengthen the offer of emotional and therapeutic support to children in care to increase placement stability even further.
- The Trust is reviewing practice around friends and family placements to increase the number of children who find permanency within their family network. Investment in Family Group Conferences will support this urgent ambition
- All children who go missing from care should be provided with the opportunity for a return home interview.

Promise 3: we'll make sure that you have every opportunity possible to do well at school.

The quality of education for children in care is not consistently good enough and we recognise that the virtual school needs to strengthen the oversight and challenge it provides. We recognise that we do not have a clear enough understanding of the progress made by children in care over time as systems to monitor pupils' progress are insufficient for this purpose.

We do know, however, from a broad perspective, that attainment for our children in care needs to improve. End of key stage outcomes for children in care are low when compared with other pupils nationally. The proportion of children in care achieving A*-C is significantly lower than the general population. This performance is in line with that of children in care nationally but is not good enough for our children and young people.

At the end of key stage 2 in 2018, pupils made noticeably better progress than the previous year, particularly in relation to reading and mathematics. However, at key stage 4, children



in care mostly progress similarly to other children in care nationally, although grades are low, especially for boys.

At present 1.5% of children in care do not have a school place. While this is a small percentage, it equates to more than 25 children. The corporate parenting ambition must be to have no children in care without a school place. Urgent work is in train to address this.

It is an encouraging position that the number of children in care with less than 25 hours education provision has now been reduced to 0.16%, a trend which needs to continue. The attendance of children in care at school has however declined overall this year.

It is welcomed that no children in care were permanently excluded during the last academic year.

The virtual school has worked effectively to overhaul the e-Personal Education Plan system, with the overall quality of Personal Education Plans starting to improve, which was recognised by OFSTED in their December 2018 Inspection. However, more needs to be done to evidence the impact of interventions on children's progress and attainment.

Young people in Birmingham engage with Higher Education at twice the national rate. Our long-established partnership with the Eve Brook Scholarship Fund provides invaluable support to young people engaged in undergraduate and post-graduate study.

Key Messages

- A robust and accurate data set needs to be established to specifically track and monitor the progress of children in care.
- No child in care should be without a school place.
- The council will need to develop a clear view on the use and impact of pupil premium.
- Changes in the leadership and governance of the virtual school will drive performance improvements in this area.

Promise 4: we'll support you to do the things you enjoy and encourage you to take part in a wide range of activities, so that your talents, hobbies and interests are met.

The Corporate Parenting Team has undertaken a range of initiatives to engage children and young people in care to become active and explore their interests and talents.

Through a number of sporting partners, the Trust has provided 844 opportunities for young people to attend sporting events such as Cricket Test matches, football matches, tennis



games and local rugby matches. As well as our young people experiencing match days, they were able to be mascots and flag wavers on the pitch and walk out with some of their sporting heroes; so far, we have had 200 sporting experiences.

As well as the above, partners have donated experiences as reward prizes for young people such as our trip to Cadbury World with Mondelez International, Stadium Tours with sports clubs such as AVFC, BCFC and Edgbaston and our proposed reward event with Tenpin at Star City.

In the Winter of 2018, the trust welcomed over 1,000 young people, adults, family, carers, partners and staff to Ice Skate Birmingham for a fun day out including the big wheel, fun house and ice skating. This event was possible thanks to the partnership with Danter entertainment who provided this opportunity. The Trust is continuing to build on this offer for 2019.

The first life skills partnership event took place in early 2019 in partnership with BCFC, Barclays, City Serve and the Birmingham Wellbeing Service. Over 350 young people and carers attended where they experienced workshops in budgeting, healthy eating, first aid, diet and nutrition, and water safety; this is developing into a structured Life Skills programme, where a pilot is currently being undertaken in some of our residential homes.

In 2018 we teamed up with Sport Birmingham to deliver the Birmingham Inclusive Sports Festival, the first event of its kind in the City. Due to the positive feedback from young people, parents and carers the Trust was the headline sponsor of the festival in 2019 and welcomed over 400 young people to the event. The next event will take place in September 2019 and the theme is leading up to the work around the Olympic games.

In 2018 the Trust worked in partnership with Fortum as part of their Management Trainee Challenge. The Fortem team transformed an out of bounds area of Charles House, Short Break Residential Home into an independent living unit and large sensory garden. The project led by the Fortum team involved 13 partners and was worth over £80,000 in labour and investment. This award-winning project has led to Fortum and the Trust securing a further project focusing on family contact. This will be launched in early September 2019.

The BAM's construction company community project in 2018 transformed the garden in one of our short break residential homes into a colour haven where young people can spend hours gardening and grow their own. This has helped our young people learn about growing fresh produce and cooking it. The young people took this a step further and had Birmingham's very first school garden at the Malvern Show. This project is now being developed across the four short break residential homes for disabled children and the next garden is being developed by our partner Jacobs in June 2019 as part of the West Midlands Mayor's Giving Day. As part of this we are working with partners developing independent hubs in each home where young people can develop life skills such as cooking and washing.



The financial challenges facing all young people are significant, but the impact on children in care and care leavers is further accentuated through a lack of a social support network and, for some, limited support from friends and family.

Birmingham Children's Trust is working in partnership with Birmingham City Council on the Future Parks Accelerator Bid that was launched in June 2019.

As part of the bid funding has been ring fenced for a Mentoring Coordinator post. This post will sit within the Corporate Parenting team within the Children's Trust and will focus on developing and widening the mentoring offer across the City.

Key Messages

- In order to broaden the range of opportunities for care leavers, procurement and contracting across the council should specify the offer that can be made in terms of employment, apprenticeship or work experience for children leaving care.
- The Birmingham Rewards staff incentives scheme should be extended to children in care and care leavers.
- All children in care should be given a free passport to leisure.
- Working with carers, we will ensure every child in care is actively involved in sporting, cultural or other organised or leisure activities.

Promise 5: we'll take care of your health and encourage you to be healthy.

Children in care receive regular health checks and over the last 12 months, 90% of children had a review within the required timescales and 95% had their routine dental checks, both of which represent good performance. OFSTED in their December 2018 inspection identified that children in care receive good access to health and dental services and these are well prioritised by social workers. We do know however that the initial health assessment when arriving in care is not done quickly enough and most children do not receive their first check-up within the required 21 days.

Children who need emotional and therapeutic support have access to the Trust's Therapeutic and Emotional Support Service (TESS) which has achieved some positive outcomes over the last 12 months. 71% of the children they worked with reported an improvement in the difficulties they presented with. Children are receiving a service do make good progress but access to mental health services and the time children have to wait for this support does need to improve.

Health passports are now being introduced and disseminated to children in care following a co-production with the children in care council (CICC) and care leavers' forum (CLF). This is a



positive development which means that children and young people can more easily benefit from health services.

Key Messages

- The emotional health and wellbeing offer to children in care needs to be strengthened to ensure all children in and out of the city receive the support they need when they need it.
- Children leaving care should be given a free prescription entitlement up to age 25, an offer that has been achieved in other leading authorities.
- All Children entering care for the first time need to have their initial health assessment within the first 3 weeks.

Promise 6: we'll give you a good and clear assessment of your needs and an up-to-date care plan.

Assessments across the Trust are in most cases thorough, exploring background history, presenting issues and information from partners. When analysing children's needs, social workers make effective use of practice methodology, clearly identifying risks that appropriately inform future actions.

Management overview is evident, and the majority of assessments contain a clear rationale for recommended action that is proportionate to children's levels of need.

Planning for children in care is improving, and over the last 12 months 98% of children's reviews were held within statutory timescales. The quality of children's reviews and subsequent care plans is inconsistent but is improving. Children's needs are, for the majority, well identified, and plans are becoming more outcome-focused to care for their needs holistically.

Practice to secure permanence for children does lack pace and maturity. While practitioners and managers have an improving focus, the impact of this on outcomes for children remains inconsistent.

The quality of recent social work assessments in care proceedings is beginning to improve, and this has been recognised by the local judiciary and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass).

There is considerable work set out within the Trust's Development Plan to improve practice and both care planning and assessment work remains at the centre of this. OFSTED have acknowledged that the Trust "Requires Improvement to be Good", acknowledging that improvement is however taking root.



Key Messages

- Assessments and care plans are largely timely and up to date.
- Young people are encouraged to participate in their assessments and in developing plans.

Promise 7: we'll make sure you have your own social worker, who visits you regularly and gives you details about how to contact them (or someone else if they're away) when you need them.

All children in care have an allocated social worker, and caseloads for these social workers average less than 20. The turnover of social workers across the children in care teams is relatively low, which means children experience greater consistency.

We know that social workers are visiting young people in care regularly. Over the last 12 months 91% of young people were seen within 6 weekly intervals.

OFSTED identified that most children in care enjoy timely support and frequent visits from social workers who know them well. The voice of children in care is given high priority and is consistently well considered by social workers.

Children are seen regularly and are seen alone by their social workers. This means that children are able to develop meaningful and trusting relationships with their social workers.

Key Messages

- The Corporate Parenting Board will need direct evidence from children and young people in relation to their experience of social work visits and to what extent they feel listened to.
- We will ensure social workers continue to visit young people regularly and spend time with them getting to know them.

Promise 8: we'll help you stay in touch with your family, friends and anyone else who's important to you.

The prime mechanism through which children and young people stay in touch with family is through contact. We recognise this as an area that needs further development. Children who are undergoing a court process currently have dedicated contact provision, but we recognise that the physical condition of the buildings where this takes place is inadequate. For those children who want to have contact but are not in court, the provision on offer is markedly inconsistent. Children should have more opportunity to see their family, build and



maintain these relationships and for this to be provided in safer and more appropriate places.

A review of contact is currently taking place to improve our offer in this regard.

Key Messages

- A clear contact offer and associated provision needs to be established and communicated to children in care.
- More children in care need to spend more time with their family and friends through dedicated family time.
- The Children's Trust will explore engagement with the national Lifelong Links Project, designed to support young people getting in touch, and staying in touch, with their families as they leave care.

Promise 9: we'll listen to what you have to say.

The Council has a number of forums through which the views of children and young people are routinely gathered. These include:

- Children in Care Council – children in care up to the age of 18
- Care Leavers Forum – Care leavers age 18 – 25
- Birmingham Together Forum – Birmingham Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young people and adults age 14 – 18+
- Birmingham Roaring Lions – Disabled children's forum young people aged 8 – 17 years

There is a range of examples where listening to young people has translated into tangible initiatives and policy change.

Children in Care Council (CICC) and Care Leavers Forum (CLF)

CICC are currently working with training and development colleagues to produce an online e learning resource. Young people have met during school holidays to drive this work. They have written their own content and enjoy being in front and behind the camera. They have developed production skills and are looking forward to launching this resource later in 2019.

As a result of this work young people have also identified other 'bite size' training packages in which they would like to be involved. CICC and CLF want staff within the Trust to be able to say



'I've completed this training because our young people asked me to!'

Young women involved in CICC have asked for a specific young women's group to focus on periods. Young women want all young women in care to be supported each month appropriately and not to feel embarrassed. CICC and CLF are making a difference by encouraging discussion and reflection within our workforce.

Young Parents Group

The members of this group have shared their experiences with colleagues and this has initiated lengthy discussion leading to a group of professionals meeting to explore how we can better support our care leavers who become young parents and our corporate 'grand' parenting responsibility to their children.

This work and our young people's experiences will help colleagues focus on how we can improve our practice to support these young people. As a direct result of meeting these young parents a short report has been shared across the Trust.

With the support of advocacy and young people's experiences a new grant is now available to ALL young women in care under 18 and not eligible for the sure start maternity grant. Young women can now access a grant of £500 recognising that being in care should not put them at a disadvantage.

CICC and CLF asked to take the lead in launching the Trust. Young people have continued to play a key role at all events where the Trust is engaging with its workforce. Our young people have continued to be actively involved including speaking at a full Trust event, a difficult task for many very experienced professionals. Our young people stepped up to the responsibility as they approach every task, we ask of them – with good humour and confidence. This also embedded the idea of children and young people being central to our thinking within the Trust.

Young people were asked to contribute to the Trust business plan and wrote the forward including these 'top tips'.

Our top tips for the Trust are;

- 1. Listen to real first-hand experiences.***
- 2. Work alongside me, work with me, explain things, and explain things again! Remember I am at the centre.***
- 3. Don't think you know what I am trying to say, don't second guess me, use the words I choose to use.***



4. *Talk to children and young people, have conversations, properly listen and please take an interest in my life.*

Staff recruitment

Young people have been involved in all senior appointments including the Director and most recently two new Assistant Directors. Best practice has now been agreed including a new rewards and recognition document that will support young people's engagement and recognition for their commitment to this process. Young people made a difference in a very evident way by having a say in the most senior appointments we have. Our young people started a relationship with those successful appointments before they were even in post. This has kept CICC and CLF at the forefront of senior managers minds and priorities.

Heath Passports

A long-term collaborative piece of work was undertaken with health as it became apparent that there was minimal use of the current health passports. Young people discussed and agreed the content and the design of the new health passport and were present at the formal launch. The passport was launched successfully in May and is now being rolled out. CICC and CLF together developed a resource that was bigger and better than expected.

Through our young people's involvement all children in care will now have access to a passport to health and NOT just care leavers. Our care leavers forum has gone on to meet with health leads several times and has been instrumental in producing a resource for care leavers with health support contact numbers.

Mind your Language campaign

Young people raised again the use of social workers' language and 'jargon' in 2018. Young people decided to reshape work from 2017 and re launch their views as part of a 'mind your language' campaign.

There was a wide breadth of feelings around language and no common consensus on what terms should be used. However young people questioned many 'common' phrases and a paper was shared with front-line staff and included in training. This work is being shared constantly and the Trust has now embedded the term 'children in care' and stopped using 'LAC'. Young people tell us they want social workers who see them as individuals and not just a 'case'. By taking the time to think about language and words our young people feel heard and listened to.

Local Care Offer



Young people worked alongside the Care Leavers Service to develop our local care offer to Care Leavers. We estimate that 40 plus hours of participative work has taken place to develop, review and finally launch the Care Leavers Offer.

The Forum have supported this piece of work to make a difference for all 21 – 25-year olds who may not have been able to have support from the Trust.

Birmingham Together Forum

The Together Forum champions unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people across the City with the support of the Corporate Parenting Team in the Trust.

The group is made up of 15 young people and adults between the ages of 14-20 across the City who come together every 4 -6 weeks during holiday periods.

These young people live within the Birmingham area come from different backgrounds, various countries and all have different experiences.

Mentoring offer

Our young people and adults tell us that having someone independent in their lives who is not a paid professional to talk to about their own aspirations and milestones is important.

This might be to discuss career opportunities, personal hobbies, the transition into independence, life skills development or just someone to go for a coffee with and have a chat.

The Corporate Parent Mentoring Scheme to date has supported over 200 young people. However, it has been identified that this offer needs to be underpinned to enable it to develop and provide our young people and adults with the very best mentoring offer that is flexible and meets individual needs.

The Trust in partnership with Birmingham City Council will appoint a Mentoring Coordinator in August 2019. The post will sit as part of the Corporate Parenting Team in the Trust and will work with the Council and key partners across the City to develop this offer further.



Promise 10: we'll work with you and give you all the help and support you need to move successfully from care to adult life.

The Trust continues to keep in touch with young people when they leave care. This is important in making sure that young people are receiving the support they need. Last year 97% of 17-18 year olds remained in contact with their support workers after they left care, which is better than statistical neighbours (86%) Currently 93% of 19-21 year olds remain in contact with the Trust.

83% of young people between 17-18 leaving care are living in suitable accommodation. This is in line with national averages but needs to improve.

For older young people between 19-21, 88% are living within suitable accommodation. Again, a figure we will seek to improve.

62% of children between 17-18 leaving care are in education, employment and training. This has fallen from 80% in 2017/18.

Work-based training provision in Birmingham has reduced over the last three years with the closure of a number of work-based training providers. Training provision available offers smaller settings where young people are taught in small groups and with more vocational focus. We need more focus within the council and with key partners and businesses to increase work-based training provision in Birmingham, and this needs to be aligned with an early notification of opportunities for our children in care.

Apprenticeships have limited viability for care leavers mainly due to the low pay and lack of additional support in the work place. Associated issues such as accommodation and transport costs put additional pressures on care leavers. Further work also needs to take place in developing a range of supportive employers who will pay higher than apprenticeship minimum wage and will offer a flexible and supportive working environment. We have developed close links with the Employment and Skills team who are enabling us to work with a range of supportive employers including M&B, Jacksons, Edgbaston Cricket Club, Kier construction and Barclays. However we can do much more to address these issues through focused leadership and coordination within the council to improve the council's offer of supported apprenticeships and other employment opportunities for care leavers along with more strategic attention to the corporate social responsibility agenda linked to corporate parenting.



Key Messages

- We will work with Birmingham City council and private housing providers to make sure all children leaving care are living within suitable accommodation.
- Through the work of the virtual school, higher education and support from careers services the number of children leaving care within education, employment or training will improve.

Priorities for 2019-20

1. Extend and deepen our offer to young people in and leaving care, across the broad children's partnership, so that our offer reflects what we would do for our own children.
2. Ensure that developments are routinely informed by the voice and experience of our children in care and care leavers.
3. Drive practice improvement in the Children's Trust for children in care and care leavers, in line with the Trust's development Plan.
4. Improve the focus, membership and accountability of the Corporate Parenting Board