



MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL
EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES DIVISION

CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

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Contact within the Midlothian Council Social Work for Further Information: Andrew Gillies

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The Midlothian Council Corporate Parenting Strategy

“Caring parents delivering improved outcomes for children and young people.”

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The Midlothian Council Corporate Parenting Strategy

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This strategy paper was considered and approved by the Midlothian Council Cabinet on Tuesday 06 May 2008

1. The Midlothian Council Corporate Parenting Strategy - Introduction

This strategy sets out Midlothian Council's responsibility as a corporate parent, with specific regard to our looked after children and young people. We are committed to ensuring every child and young person in our care has the opportunity to achieve the outcomes we would want for every child. This commitment includes the provision of support that addresses disadvantage and enables children and young people to reach their full potential. The corporate responsibility of the whole council and its partners as corporate parents will deliver improved outcomes for looked after children and young people. The strategy will bring together in a coordinated way through the Midlothian Children's Services strategy and plans already in place and deliver a coherent approach to meeting the needs of children and young people.

2. Executive summary

This Corporate Parenting Strategy provides the framework for elected members, officers and partners in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities, as corporate parents of looked after children and young people in Midlothian.

2.1 Background

The concept of the Corporate Parent has evolved through the publication of national legislation, policy and position statements. These are: [*The Children \(Scotland\) Act, 1995*](#), [*Getting it Right for Every Child \(2005\)*](#), and [*Extraordinary Lives \(2006\)*](#),). The policy document [*Looked after Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better \(2007\)*](#), set out the expectation that every Local Authority will develop a corporate approach to the care and welfare, and protection of children and young people who are looked after and accommodated. The Scottish Government's vision for children is,

- by working together, we will enable and empower children and young people in;
- becoming effective life long learners;
- developing into successful and responsible adults;
- being emotionally, mentally and physically healthy; and,
- feeling safe and nurtured in a home setting.

2.2 Key principles

Successful corporate parenting depends upon having clear strategic leadership and Elected members and Senior officers of the Council have a key role to play in ensuring that the outcomes and life chances of looked after children and young people are maximised.

Being a good corporate parent means:

- accepting responsibility for all children in the Council's care;
- keeping meeting the needs of looked after children and young people as a high priority;
- seeking the same outcomes, any good parent would want for their own child.

There are four national expectations of local authorities and their partners in fulfilling their corporate parenting role, these are as follows.

That the local authority will:

- have an overarching plan for looked after children and young people, covering all of the services and support they can expect to receive;
- ensure that the views of children in council care are taken account of;
- provide training and support, for those who have act as the collective Corporate Parent;
- identifying and share best practice in corporate parenting throughout the council area.

2.3 Midlothian Council the Corporate Parent

Expectation 1 – A Planned Approach. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy has been developed to set out a clear commitment to our looked after children and young people. The strategy will be further developed through consultation and involvement with children, young people and their families, fellow professionals and services, and our children's services partners.

The aim of the strategy is to improve the outcomes for looked after children and young people in Midlothian through an authority wide commitment to corporate parenting. It keeps looked after children and young people as a high priority within the corporate agenda, ensuring that momentum is not lost in our efforts to achieve positive outcomes and improved life chances for those in our care. One of the outcomes of the corporate strategy will be clear lines of accountability and governance. This will ensure that we deliver a high quality and competent service to children, young people, and their families. The final element of the strategy will be a framework for action, which will set out our action plans to progress the strategy including developing effective ways to engage with all of the services who contribute to the care and welfare of looked after children and young people. Outcome-focused action plans will be developed to deliver the key priorities identified within the framework for action.

Expectation 2 – The views of looked after children and young people. In Midlothian, corporate parenting responsibilities will be overseen by the working group for looked after children and young people. The group will meet with looked after children and young people at least twice a year to gain their views. The group will provide opportunities for elected members to have direct contact on a regular basis with looked after children and young people and in particular those accommodated by the local authority

Expectation 3 – Training and Support. Training and support will be provided to those who have strategic responsibility as corporate parents. We will also provide training and support for those who act as a Champion for a looked after and accommodated child or young person.

Expectation 4 – A Planned Approach. There are already a number of good examples of corporate parenting activities in Midlothian. By building on this already established good practice the Midlothian Corporate Parenting strategy will ensure a that a more consistent and effective approach to corporate parenting is delivered across the council area.

2.4 Next steps

The Next Steps in the planned approach to delivering the Corporate Parenting Strategy in Midlothian. The Midlothian Corporate Parenting Strategy will be submitted to Cabinet for its consideration and subsequent endorsement. The strategy and accompanying framework for action will then be implemented across Midlothian, and will be monitored and evaluated through the Children's Services Forum.

3. The role of elected members and officers of the Council

Elected members are at the head of the Council and therefore are responsible for the development of and implementation of Council policy and priorities for improvement. They actively promote and support the standards of care for children and young people and they actively seek high quality outcomes for looked after children and young people. As corporate parents we act as **“caring parents delivering improved outcomes for children and young people”** in our care.

In order to be fully aware of the circumstances of the children and young people in the care of the local authority, corporate parents, elected members and senior managers need to know:

- How many looked after children and young people do they have corporate parent responsibility for? And some core facts about who these children are in terms of age, gender, race, religion and disability.
- The reasons why the children are looked after?
- Where their children and young people are 'looked after'
- How many moves these children and young people experience whilst being looked after? Moves between carers and schools.

This will provide the background information, knowledge and understanding of the circumstances of these children and young people so that informed decisions can be taken by elected members and officers of the council.

4. Looked after children and young people

The term 'looked after' was introduced in the Children (Scotland) Act, 1995 and is used to describe any child or young person for whom a local authority has a statutory and or parental responsibility. The term 'looked after' includes children who are subject to supervision and live with family members as well as foster and or kinship carers, residential schools or care homes. The Children (Scotland) Act, 1995 defines 'children' as anyone under 18. The authority

continues to have a responsibility to support care leavers aged up to 21 and sometimes 24 if they are continuing in education - in the same way as other parents would support their children and young people beyond childhood and on their way to adulthood.

Research evidence indicates these children face multiple disadvantages from being in the care system. Their educational achievement and attainment, and their emotional health and wellbeing are at risk of serious failure or restricted development and growth. The key performance measures are considerably lower for 'looked after' children and young people than for their peers. They are 12 times more likely to leave school without any qualifications and 50 times more likely to be sent to prison. Alcohol and drug abuse is higher amongst this group, along with homelessness, teenage pregnancy, and mental illness. The children of looked after children and young people are 50 times more likely to have a care experience than the children of non-looked after parents. Many looked after children and young people do not do as well as their peers, are more likely to be unemployed and have problems as adults.

However, the publication "Extraordinary Lives" (2006), challenged the negative stereotype of looked after children and young people claiming there is nothing inevitable about them doing less well in education, having poor health or being involved in offending behaviour. The report stated that with support, and stability, these children could achieve their full potential and achieve their goals much like children in our own families.

Contrary to popular belief only a small minority of children and young people are looked after by the local authority due to severe behavioural issues. Children may be looked after for short or long periods, some children return home, some become part of adoptive families, and some children remain looked after for many years until they reach adulthood.

5. The current position within Midlothian

In Midlothian during 2006-07, we had an average of 302 looked after children and young people. This does not reflect the number of children who are cared for on a series of short respite breaks. The majority of the looked after and accommodated children and young people need alternative care and accommodation due to the inability of their parent, for a range of reasons, to offer safe and effective caring within the family home. Many of these children and young people have suffered abuse and or neglect of some form. The following gives a breakdown of the national 'looked after' children statistics in Scotland and in Midlothian.

(Scottish Executive Looked after Children Statistics, 2005/06)

Midlothian Council Education and Children's Services Division

The following gives a breakdown of the national looked after children statistics in Scotland and in Midlothian.

(*Scottish Executive Looked after Children Statistics, 2005/06*)

Figure 1

Looked after children		*04/05	*05/06	*06/07
Total looked after children	National	12185	12966	14060
	Midlothian	240	266	302
looked after children at home	National	43%	43%	43%
	Midlothian	35%	32%	33%
looked after in foster care	National	28%	29%	29%
	Midlothian	25%	28%	28%
looked after in Kinship care	National	14%	13%	14%
	Midlothian	21%	15%	24%
looked after in other community placements	National	2%	2%	2%
	Midlothian	1%	1%	2%
Looked after and accommodated	National	13%	13%	12%
	Midlothian	18%	24%	13%

Against the national trend, we have been successful in reducing the number of looked after and accommodated children through the provision of improved community based packages of social care and educational support. Over an 18 month period 06-07 the numbers of looked after and accommodated children in Midlothian dropped from 163 to 125 with only 3 new admissions to residential school in that period. There is an increase in the number who are accommodated in kinship care. Additionally, some children have a series of short term respite breaks. However the proportion of children looked after and accommodated in comparison with looked after at home is higher than for other benchmarking authorities and we will work to change this.

There are already a number of Corporate Parenting initiatives evident in Midlothian. These have ranged from education provision through the services of the Pupil Support Service which offers a range of additional support for looked after children and young people. A joint venture between education and social work has seen the development of a Multi-agency Resource Group (MARG) whose function, along with a number of other tasks, is to review the appropriateness of secure accommodation referrals. Social work is developing Kinship Care and Family Group conferencing to ensure wherever possible, children remain within their own families. Midlothian council's housing department has been involved in developing initiatives to respond to the needs of looked after young people leaving the care system. Midlothian Council has also been innovative in piloting a number of schemes for 'looked after and accommodated' children, with successful outcomes.

It is important to recognise that these developments however are only the beginning of what will require to be a coordinated and consistently applied approach to meeting the needs of looked after children and young people.

6. What our Corporate Parenting strategy will deliver

In relation to our looked after children and young people, and in delivering our corporate parenting strategy we wish to:

- be ambitious for them, encourage, and support their efforts to reach their full potential through education, training, and employment;
- celebrate their achievements;
- celebrate birthdays and festivals within the individual child or young person's culture;
- encourage, enable and support appropriate contact with family members where it is in the child's best interests to do so;
- encourage them to feel part of the local community through contact and involvement with local organisations;
- ensure access to appropriate health services;
- provide care in comfortable settings and access to a range of education, accommodation, leisure activities, and other public services to which all children and young people are entitled to access according to their needs;
- provide appropriate care, structure and guidance to support the child or young person's development and be a tolerant, dependable and supportive partner in the adult - child relationship;
- recognise, respect and support their growth to independence by being tolerant and supportive;
- provide consistent support and be available to provide advice, guidance and practical help when needed;
- act as an Advocate and trouble-shoot on their behalf;
- ensure that the views of looked after children and young people can help shape services to meet their needs.

7. Corporate Parenting Outcomes

Corporate Parenting is about ethics, standards, responsibility, duty, and accountability. More than that, it is about improving the outcomes for children and young people. The specific outcomes from our strategy will be as follows.

7.1 A Corporate Parenting strategy that will be promoted by all elected members and senior officers of the council.

7.2 Our corporate parenting commitment will be realised through the provision of quality care and a range of opportunities that lead to improved outcomes that will improve in the life chances of our looked after children and young people, enabling and empowering them to succeed in line with their peers.

- 7.3 Key Outcomes for looked after children and young people in the Corporate and Divisional Priorities and Plans.
- 7.4 Regular reporting to Cabinet on the Midlothian position in relation to looked after children and young people and reporting on progress in achieving our improved outcomes for these children and young people.
- 7.5 Policies and practices that promote access to services for looked after children and young people and their carers.
- 7.6 In order to demonstrate our commitment to provide direct leadership support we will provide a Champion for every looked after and accommodated child and young person in Midlothian.
- 7.7 Opportunities for key elected members and officers to meet with looked after children and young people to hear and take account of their views.
- 7.8 Children and young people are consulted in decisions made about the services that affect them so that they have an opportunity to influence those decisions.
- 7.9 Effective partnership working to deliver relevant services to looked after children and young people, and a joint planning and commissioning framework to meet their needs.
- 7.10 The provision of education, training, and employment opportunities that offer supportive learning and work experiences, and employment opportunities for young people who are looked after.
- 7.11 Improved through-care and aftercare provision for looked after children and young people.

8. Individual services and partner services – roles and responsibilities

In order to deliver the 'corporate parenting' strategy we need to make explicit the individual functions, including roles and responsibilities of the relevant council and partner services. The following summarises what we expect from, social work, education, health, leisure, through-care and aftercare, housing, employment, training, and further & higher education. An important element of the strategy is the involvement and participation of our looked after children and young people.

8.1 Social Work – Assessment and case management

The provision of services to looked after children and young people is highly regulated by the government, and this is reflected in the policy framework adopted by Midlothian Council's children and families' social work section. The design and direction of services recognises the importance of families, seeking to engage parents and the extended family in the care and planning process. We will ensure that if a child has to enter care or accommodation our

first consideration is to a family placement. As a council we are committed to reducing our higher than the national average figures of 'looked after and accommodated' children and young people whilst maintaining best practice. We aim to do this by developing policies that promote and support children living within their own family's networks through Family Group Conferencing and effective kinship care procedures.

Recognising a positive and joined up approach with partners is essential to ensure children have a positive experience of being looked after, social work through a multi-agency approach, is committed to the ongoing development of an Integrated Assessment Framework. The framework alongside policies for robust gate keeping, planning, and the monitoring of outcomes for looked after children and young people will enable improved responses to need and deliver effective early intervention and preventative services. In addition to this the Midlothian Council Social Work department will monitor and promote placement stability, and the recruitment and retention of staff.

If care and accommodation away from the natural family cannot be avoided the aim will be to achieve a speedy rehabilitation with the family in a way that safeguards the child and promotes the child's well being. Every child who enters care or accommodation will be the subject of an assessment which will inform structured and purposeful care planning including other agencies, which identifies the child's needs and sets out a specific framework for action and review. We will ensure that all children have an allocated social worker and that accurate, up to date, comprehensive case records are maintained for each looked after child and young person.

8.2 Social Work – Through-care and aftercare

The legal responsibilities for young people previously looked after are contained within the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, and the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Regulations 2003. As the Local Authority, we have a legal duty to assess, plan, and provide resources towards looked after children leaving the care system. This includes our corporate parenting responsibility towards young people engaging in full time education up to the age of 24. The challenges ahead include devising multi-agency pathways, assessments and to ensure we support young people with the practicalities of transition, training and employment, accommodation, finance, and emotional support, in line with the normal experiences of their peers. To deliver a quality 'Through-care and Aftercare' service we need to work alongside the social workers for children and families at the 'pathways' stage, as well as working in partnership with other agencies, for example housing and education, health and employment.

8.3 Education and Communities

The Education and Communities Division will maintain an overview of all looked after and accommodated children and young people to ensure that they can maintain a school place with supports tailored to meet their individual needs. The Division is well placed to have a positive influence on the education and career pathway of a child or young person. We are committed to providing young children with the best start in life through our Early Years and Childcare provision.

Looked after and in particular accommodated children and young people are a vulnerable group who are susceptible to low levels of achievement and attainment, often related to frequent changes of school when their care placements change. Raising aspirations and providing effective and targeted support and guidance for individual pupils are key factors in the successful strategies for meeting the educational and social needs of these pupils.

Individual Educational Plans will ensure that all needs are planned for during important times such as transition to a new school, during exam periods and on the transition from school based education to employment or training. We are committed to working with the relevant partner agencies and services so that care placement moves will not occur during exam times, unless there are unusual circumstances when specific and detailed support a package will be provided for the young person.

The community learning and development service can provide networking opportunities for children and young people to develop their social skills in community learning activities and environments.

Midlothian Council will develop a scheme which will provide supported opportunities for looked after children and young people to access Council library and leisure facilities. This will contribute to increased levels of achievement through participation in productive and healthy leisure activities. Leisure Services staff will work in liaison and partnership with education and social work staff to ensure that looked after children and young people can belong to and participate in community and school-based activities. This will assist these children and young people to make friendships within the community that they live within.

8.4 Employment and training

We want all looked after children and young people to achieve their aspirations and goals along their career pathway. We need to ensuring that young people are aware of all the training and employment opportunities available to them. Further and Higher Education will be involved in encouraging and inspiring looked after children and young people to reach their full potential through a variety of inclusive targeted access strategies. Alongside this provision for allowing young people to access relevant work experience and or apprenticeships is essential for maintaining their sense of inclusion during the transition from adolescent to adulthood. Midlothian Council as a major employer is well placed to provide work experience placements and or apprenticeships, within the various departments of the council.

8.5 Health

Specialist Nurses for looked after children and young people play an important role in ensuring that Personal Health Plans are developed with the child and young person and that these are fully implemented. Confidentiality is central to the success of Personal Health Plans, with personal information being protected and with the full involvement of the child and young person in developing and managing their own health plan. Developing tracking and referral protocols and effective communication channels between agencies is fundamental, to ensure that children do not fall through the net. Improving the health of looked after

children and young people is a high priority. This will include meeting the mental health needs and reducing the frequency of suicide and self-harming. As the emotional and physical health of children may have been impaired before entering the care system, we therefore have an obligation to improve the health outcomes for looked after children and young people.

8.6 Housing

Midlothian Council has a commitment to enabling young people to remain in their care placement until 18 or beyond. The *Regulation of Care (Scotland) Regulations 2003*, has addressed a number of the issues concerning homeless young people, the lack of supported tenancies and or alternative supported accommodation remain a major concern within the aftercare strategy. We are committed to working with the Housing Unit and other housing providers to increase the number of properties available for vulnerable young people. Midlothian has a current under development in Penicuik to accommodate 13 persons, 5 in a core unit and 8 in adjacent flats.

The Council in partnership with a private sector landlord will, in the very near future, deliver a Private Sector Leasing scheme which will widen the options available to homeless young people.

9. Consultation, engagement and participation

Midlothian's looked after children and young people have a wealth of experience and knowledge of the care system, therefore it is important that they are consulted on the various elements of our developing improvement strategy. This will allow us to gather and take account of their views, so that these views can inform decisions made about their lives. Involvement with their own care plans gives ownership to the children and young people and should make the goals and targets relevant and achievable. The involvement of children and young people in reviews should be further encouraged, monitored and evaluated, to ensure that we provide them with quality opportunities to be involved and engaged. Consultation at various levels including meetings with elected members, relevant officers and partners and an established group of 'looked after' children and young people, will take place on a regular basis.

10. A Framework for action

The report *'Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better'* (The Scottish Executive 2007) set out 19 specific and targeted actions across the 8 key themes which are as follows.

The importance of the corporate parent role.

The need to raise awareness of the educational needs of looked after children and young people and improve training for all foster carers, residential workers, lead professionals, support workers and associated professionals.

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The need for clarity regarding the role and responsibilities of the designated person within schools and residential establishments.

The importance of providing flexible and appropriate support before, during and post transitions.

The importance of physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing in facilitating positive educational outcomes.

The need for good quality accommodation, which supports the education, training or employment of looked after children and young people.

The importance of clear advice and a range of emotional, practical and financial support for 'looked after' young people as they make the transition to adulthood/independent living.

The vital importance of stability and continuity within education and care settings.

These 8 themes will be used as the basis of the Council's framework for Action and its associated Plan. The detailed plan of how the council intends to develop the corporate parenting strategy will be drafted and will involve discussion and collaboration with the appropriate services, agencies and partners, and looked after and accommodated children and young people.

Finally, whilst this document lays out clear goals and aspirations for our looked after children and young people, it should be viewed as a developmental work in progress. It will evolve to meet the changing needs of our children and young people, and reflect the Council's belief that all of our children and young people deserve the best possible start in life.

In Midlothian our aim is that - *Looked after children and young people will have access to services that will enable them to overcome disadvantage and to achieve their full potential.*

As corporate parents we act as **"caring parents delivering improved outcomes for children and young people"** in our care.

V7 – 06 May 2008

Point of reference:
Forbes Mitchell
Head of Service, Education and Communities
education.servcies@midlothian.gov.uk