

'If this were my child...'
- the role of district councillors in
corporate parenting

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What is corporate parenting?

“For children who are looked after, your council has a legal and moral duty to try to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would give to their children....you should do your utmost to make sure that children in public care get a good start in life....”

Letter from Frank Dobson, Secretary of State for Health sent to all councillors in 1998

Legal and policy context

Corporate parenting responsibilities reiterated in subsequent legislation and statutory guidance:

- **Children Act 1989 remains the underpinning legislation**
- Children Leaving Care Act 2000
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Children Act 2004
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

“Stable placements, good health and support during transition are all essential elements, but children will only achieve their potential through the ambition and high expectation of all those involved in their lives.”

Responsibilities of the local authority for children in care and care leavers

- Extensive legal and statutory powers, duties and responsibilities on local authorities for planning, safeguarding, promoting health, wellbeing and life chances
- Includes sharing parental responsibility in some circumstances
- Duties to care leavers extend to at least age 21
- Backed up by raft of performance indicators

Responsibilities of all councillors

- Awareness of corporate parenting role and shared responsibility for ensuring needs of children are met
- Awareness of profile and needs of children in care in the authority
- Understanding the impact of council decisions on children in care and care leavers
- Receive information about quality of care and services for children in care and care leavers
- Ensure action being taken to address any shortcomings
- Champion the needs of children in care and care leavers in their area

Being in care

Two main categories of public care:

- “Accommodated” at the request of parents and/or young person (Section 20, Children Act 1989)
- Subject to a Care Order (by order of a court under Section 31, Children Act 1989)

Why are children in care?

Reason	Percent
Abuse or neglect	62%
Problems in family functioning	14%
Family in acute stress	9%
Absent parents	5%
Parents illness or disability	4%
Child's disability	3%
Child's socially unacceptable behaviour	2%

Why does it matter?

The cost of getting it wrong:

- Poor educational performance
- Contact with criminal justice system
- Poor physical and mental health
- Homelessness
- Unemployment
- Difficulty in future relationships and parenting
- Risk of further abuse

= huge cost to the individual

= potential huge cost financially to the state

= poor inspection outcomes for the local authority

SERIOUS
ABOUT
SOCIAL WORK

What helps children and young people do well in care?

- Someone who cares for them, believes in them and sticks by them
- Stability, including of high quality care placements
- Security
- Continuity of support
- Support services to promote resilience and capacity:
“not just fixing what is broken but nurturing what is best”
- Listening to what children and young people are saying
- Ensuring young people are becoming employable
- Ensuring young people leaving care have access to safe, permanent, suitable accommodation

Our vision for children in care in Essex

- Provide early, targeted help, effecting change to enable children to be brought up safely and healthily in their own families...
- Provide assessment, support and advice to families and where necessary safeguard children whose families are unable to provide good enough care
- Provide and commission high quality substitute care within family settings, as near to home as possible and maintaining links with the birth family whenever this is in the child's best interests
- Where family based placements are not appropriate, provide high quality residential care
- Support children in care and care leavers to achieve and succeed
- Work respectfully with children and their families and involve them in the future design and improvement of our services

The Epping picture

Number of children in care from Epping district	41
Number per 10,000 of child population	16
Number of these placed in Epping district	5
Number of children in care to Essex CC placed in Epping district	29
Number of foster carers in Epping district	12
Number of priority housing nominations for care leavers across all district councils in Essex	35
Number of housing nominations in Epping district for care leavers	0
Percentage of care leavers in West Essex not in education, training or employment	34%

What can you do to help?

- Help or support the development of work experience opportunities for young people in care and care leavers within Epping DC and key partner agencies
- Help or support the development of apprenticeships and employment opportunities
- Support/request access to priority nominations for care leavers in Epping district
- Support/request foster carers being seen as a priority housing group
- Provide free access to leisure facilities to children in care and care leavers
- Promote fostering for Essex CC at a local level
- Champion children and care leavers at every opportunity

Key points to remember

- Corporate parenting is not the same as “ordinary” parenting, it carries different responsibilities **BUT**....
- When corporate parenting clashes with other responsibilities of councillors remember the principle “if this were my child”
- Looked after children are entitled to privacy
- Corporate parents have a duty to question and challenge aspects of the service to children looked after
- Corporate parents must recognise the complexity of caring for children looked after – there are not always easy solutions