

# Caring for Our Children in Care and Care Leavers

Our Vision:

*To secure the best possible outcomes for children in care and care leavers, and to support them to achieve independence.*

## Telford & Wrekin Council’s Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018 to 2020



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## 1. FOREWORD

Telford & Wrekin Council want our children and young people to achieve their ambitions and reach their full potential. The purpose of this strategy is to reaffirm the Council's commitment and reinforce the corporate responsibilities of the whole council, jointly with our partners, to ensure that our children in care and care leavers achieve their full potential.

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy describes the key steps we will take to drive improvement and assess progress in delivering our ambitions for children and young people.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy has been produced in consultation with Telford & Wrekin's main stakeholders Health, Children in Care Council (VOICE), Care Leavers Forum and the Foster Carer Association.

We hope you will share our ambition to support and contribute to their success wherever possible.



Cllr Paul Watling: Lead Member  
Children, Young People & Communities



Clive Jones  
Director: Children's and Adult Services

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Telford & Wrekin Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018 to 2020. The overall aim of the strategy is to reinforce the corporate responsibility of the whole council, and of its partner agencies, through commitment to corporate parenting.

As a Corporate Parent of children in care, elected members and Council officers have a statutory responsibility for their wellbeing. Like any good parent, the Council should put the needs of our children in care and care leavers first. We aim for each and every child looked after by Telford & Wrekin Council, wherever they live, to be helped to achieve their potential. This means being a powerful advocate for them to ensure their needs are met in the best way possible and prioritising access to resources.

Our vision is to ensure that our children in care have the best opportunities in life regardless of whether they live in Telford and Wrekin or outside the borough. We want our children and young people to be happy and healthy, safe and protected, supported successfully into adult life and get the right support and services where they live.

We aim to work in partnership with children in care and care leavers, as well as their carers, to hear their views on how best to ensure everyone achieves their full potential. This will build on the Corporate Parenting Pledge, which was created by children in care and has been signed by the Council and its partners. We expect everyone working with children and young people, in every agency and every part of our services, to expect the best and go the extra mile to safeguard a child in care and care leavers.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy describes how the local authority and its partners, such as health services, housing, and schools, act as responsible parents to children in care and care leavers. It is about how everyone involved including elected members, officers, teachers and GP's recognise that they are corporate parents and understand what they can contribute to being the best Corporate Parent.

When providing a service for our Children in Care and Care Leavers we should challenge ourselves by asking '**would this be good enough for my child?**'

We need to make sure that Children in Care and Care Leavers feel safe and secure, have stability in their lives, and that we help them to achieve their full potential by supporting them in fulfilling their ambitions and aspirations.

Building strong, resilient children leads to strong resilient adults. Our corporate parenting responsibility sits within a context of a vibrant stable town that supports all aspects of family life. The children in care and care leavers we are responsible for now, are our parents of tomorrow. By providing them with positive life chances this will have a positive contribution towards the Borough's social and economic future.

This strategy demonstrates the Council's commitment to ensuring that the life chances of every child and young person in its care are improved in line with their peers. This requires us

all to be strong advocates to ensure their needs are met in the best way possible, and to prioritise access to our resources. The Corporate Parenting Strategic Group continues to work in partnership with children in care, care leavers and carers to hear their views on how to best meet their needs. The priorities that we have identified have been determined by local and national priorities and in continued consultation with children in care and care leavers.

This strategy defines the overarching priorities for the next three years, with the annual action plan which details how these priorities will be delivered working closely with Children in Care and Care Leavers.

### **3. PRINCIPLES OF CORPORATE PARENTING**

In October 2017, the Department for Education launched their consultation on the draft statutory guidance for “*Applying corporate parenting principles to care and pathway planning*”. The following section is an extract (Section 2.1 to 2.3) from this draft guidance upon which this strategy is based on.

*“In order to thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:*

- 1) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, 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 those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.*

*The corporate parenting principles do not exist in a vacuum. They should shape the mind-set and culture of every part of a local authority in how it carries out all of its functions in relation to looked after children and care leavers...*

*The corporate parenting principles are not about applying a formulaic approach to how services are delivered in relation to looked after children and care leavers. Rather they describe the behaviours and attitudes expected of councils when they are acting as any good parent would do by supporting, encouraging and guiding their children to lead healthy, rounded and fulfilled lives. The principles intend to ensure that all councils have high ambitions for the children in their care. In doing so, the application of the principles must respond to the individual needs, vulnerabilities or disadvantages of looked after children and care leavers. This will assist in securing that such children and young people are not placed at significant disadvantage when compared with the support a non-looked after child or young person may receive from their family.”*

These principles apply to not only local authorities but also to all agencies working with children in care and care leavers.

#### **4. NATIONAL CONTEXT**

Children in the care of local authorities are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The majority of children in care are there because they have suffered abuse or neglect. At 31 March 2016 there were 7,440 children in care, in England (of whom some 74% are subject to care orders). This represents an increase of around 5% since 2012 and means that around 0.6% of the total population of children are in care. (DfE, 31 March 2016)

Of the children in care, most are in foster care (74%), whilst some 10% are in children’s homes and the remainder are cared for in a number of different settings including residential schools and placements with parents. (DfE, 31 March 2016)

Nationally, it is recognised that care leavers are a vulnerable group that leave ‘home’ at a younger age and have more abrupt transitions than their peers that require support of a variety of services. Nationally, there are 26,400 19, 20 and 21 year old care leavers (DfE, 31 March 2016). At the end of March 2017 there were 140 care leavers in Telford and Wrekin of which 94% (132 of 140) were in suitable accommodation and 60% (85 of 140) were in education, employment or training (EET).

The circumstances and experiences of children and young people in care mean that they can experience many disadvantages and hence have poorer outcomes than other children, across a range of measures, including health and education.

In April 2017, the Children and Social Work Act was passed and this has enhanced the legislation for children in care and care leavers, including the requirement for all care leavers to

have a personal advisor, an assessment of need and a pathway plan. The act extended the age range for Care Leavers from 21 to 25 years of age and supersedes the Children Act 1989 and 2000 definition. The definition of children in care, or looked after, remains the same:

- A child or young person is subject to a full or Interim Care Order, where the local authority shares parental responsibility with the child or young person's parent/s,

Or

- A child or young person is provided with accommodation on a voluntary basis where the parent or caregiver retains parental responsibility, but recognises that they need support to achieve the best outcomes for the child or young person.

The **legislation** which relates both generally and specifically to this strategy are:

- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- Legal Aid and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012
- Raising the Participation Age duties as set out in the Education and Skills Act 2008
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Children and Social Work Act 2017

## 5. TELFORD & WREKIN CONTEXT

Within Telford and Wrekin, 379 children and young people were in care as at 31 March 2017.

Of the 379 children in care:

- 62 (16%) were from a Black Minority Ethnic (BME) background

Of the 182 children who came into care during 2016/17

- 44 (24%) were aged under 1 year
- 46 (25%) were aged 1-4
- 42 (23%) were aged 5-9
- 43 (24%) were aged 10-15
- 7 (4%) were aged 16+

With respect to placements as at the end of March 2017, the majority, 81% (305 children), were placed within a family setting, with 11% (41 children) placed in residential placements and the remaining 8% (33 children) being placed for adoption, living independently or in other accommodation. 57% of children in care were placed in the Borough, with 37% placed out of the Borough, and the remaining 6% being placed for adoption.

Placement stability is crucial to positive outcomes for children in care. In 2016/17 12% (45) of the Children in Care as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 had 3 placements or more in the year; this represented an increase on the previous year's figure of 7.6%.

In the authority's Looked After Children return submission for 2016/17, 94% (132 of 140) care leavers were in suitable accommodation and 60% (85 of 140) were in education, employment or training (EET).

## **6. THE PLEDGE**

The Corporate Parenting Strategic Group, in July 2015 decided to distribute the promise to children in care and care leavers concerning the values and the expected standard of service, in the Telford & Wrekin area.

A consultation exercise was held with children in care and care leavers concerning the design and content of the pledge. The consultation discussed what works and does not work in relation to specific components of the pledge. The finalised leaflets and posters are based upon what our children and young people requested.

The Pledge was then reviewed with a representative group of children in care and members of the Corporate Parenting Strategic Group as part of the National Takeover Day in November 2016.

Each element of the Pledge was reviewed by a working group of two children in care and two members of the Corporate Parenting Strategic Group; looking at both the content of this element and also the relevance to the young people from their experiences of being in care to Telford and Wrekin. As a result of the feedback from this session, there was resounding support for the content of the Pledge and the young people in particular felt that it matched their expectations of the level of support they would expect from Corporate Parents.

Telford & Wrekin Pledge poster for younger children

# THE PLEDGE

### VALUES

**We will:**

- Treat you with respect. Celebrate you as an individual and honour and support your unique identity.
- Take time to listen to you and place your needs, views and feelings at the heart of decisions made about you.
- Always be truthful, and we will not make promises that we cannot keep.
- Believe in you, trust you, value and celebrate your strengths, gifts, talents and achievements and encourage your ambitions.

### KEEPING SAFE

**We will:**

- Give you fair boundaries and help you to understand why they are there.
- Make sure that you have a good carer where you feel settled, and who is loving, caring, kind and safe and makes sure that you are included in all activities such as holidays.
- Help you learn from mistakes, provide you with second chances and give you sound guidance and role models.
- Do everything we can to make sure that you are happy and feel safe when you move on to independent living.

### BEING HEALTHY

**We will:**

- Make sure that you have the information and practical support that will allow you to make healthy choices.
- Make sure that all medicine you understand what is going to happen and what is expected of you.
- Support you to access specific health services when you need to.
- Provide you with emotional support and help you to manage changing relationships and come to terms with loss, trauma or other significant life events.

### BECOMING INDEPENDENT

**We will:**

- Help you gain the practical and emotional skills necessary and have the confidence to look after yourself. We will work with all the services that you need to help you establish and sustain yourself as an independent individual.
- Work alongside you to look at your options and prepare you to move on from care at your pace with good accommodation and a support package that is right for you.
- Make sure that you have your personal documents such as your birth certificate, national insurance number and passport before you are 16.
- We recognise that at different times you may need to take a step back and start you come back for support.

### ENJOY AND ACHIEVE

**We will:**

- Make sure that you have a place at a good school or nursery, and that if you get behind in education you can access extra tuition if you want to.
- Celebrate your birthday, special occasions and achievements with you.
- Make sure that you do not have to fight to pursue your goals and help push aside any barriers that might stop you from achieving them.
- Hold high ambitions for you and make sure you have every opportunity to succeed.

**We will support you to make informed choices about your education, particularly with your options for GCSE's and your future career path.**

### MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION

**We will:**

- Make sure that you can access good quality and up to date information that is presented in a way that you want and covers every point in your journey through care, including about services that you can expect to receive at different stages through your journey and your legal entitlements.
- Take time to help you to understand any decisions that affect you. Negotiate with you and show you how we have taken your opinions into account. If we disagree with you we will fully explain our reasons why.
- Make sure that you have opportunities to voice your opinions on the services that you receive and that your opinions are taken into account by managers when they are planning and reviewing services.
- Make sure that your meetings are about you, are held in a way that is right for you and that you are listened to. We will also make sure that you are consulted about when, where and who attends your meetings.

### CONTACT

**We will:**

- Make every effort to give you regular and good quality contact with people that are important to you.
- Value your relationships and make sure that you have opportunities to get to know, and when needed, to say goodbye to people that are important to you.
- Try and make sure that we do not change your social worker or reviewing officer unless needed, and that they spend quality time with you.
- Provide easy access to complaints and appeals processes, and promote and encourage access to independent advocacy whenever you need it.

### MOVING ON

**We will:**

- Make sure you know where to get current information once you are no longer in touch with leaving care services, and where possible provide you with advice and support if you need it.
- Make clear to you what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see, and support you to access your information when you want it, to manage any feelings that you might have about the information and to put on record any disagreement about factual content.
- Do our best to support you until you are settled in your independent life, even if you are no longer legally entitled to this service.
- We will not forget you, and will continue to care about you and remain your supporters in what ever way we can, even when our formal relationship with you has ended.

**Signatures of the Corporate Parenting Strategic Group who have agreed to implement The Pledge:**

In April 2017, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 became law and within it, it requires a specific Care Leaver's promise to be developed by Local Authorities. This will be developed during 2018 by the Care Leavers Forum.

## 7. OUR VISION

***“To secure the best possible outcomes for children in care and care leavers, and to support them to achieve independence.”***

Telford & Wrekin Council has seven priorities, of which the following four are relevant to this strategy:

- Putting our children and young people first,
- Protecting and supporting our vulnerable children and adults,
- Improving local people’s prospects through education and skills training; and
- Improving the health and wellbeing of our communities and address health inequalities.

Our children in care and care leavers are an important part of our community and although council finances are still challenging, the priorities enable us to move forward as an organisation and for us to have a clear view on what we need to deliver.

## 8. PRIORITIES

The four priorities for Telford & Wrekin children in care and care leavers are:

### ***Priority 1 - Health & Emotional Wellbeing***

This is important because children who have been looked after by authorities have statistically poorer outcomes in many areas of life, one of which may be health. Children may enter care with unaddressed or current health issues which may have arisen through poverty, neglect, abuse, exposure to parental substance misuse, parents’ ill health and chaotic lifestyles.

We want to ensure that all children in care and care leavers are able to access appropriate health (including mental health) services in order for them to be healthy and achieve independence.

We will do this by:

- Ensuring that all children in care and care leavers received regular health reviews in accordance with statutory guidance;
- Ensuring that ‘Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) are completed and are available at the young person’s health review;
- Reviewing the 0-25 Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service to ensure it meets the needs of children in care and care leavers;
- Ensuring that children in care and care leavers receive age appropriate healthy relationship and sexual health guidance; and
- Further developing the strategic partnership between the local authority and health services through the Pan-Shropshire Health of Looked after Children Groups to enable key decisions about health services for children in care and care leavers to be resolved.

## ***Priority 2 - Educational Achievement, Employment and Training***

Educational achievement is critical if children in care and care leavers are going to lead fulfilled and successful lives.

We want every child in care to have a place in a 'good' or better school that best meets their needs and that they have no delay in accessing their education. We want children in care and care leavers to achieve the best possible educational and employment outcomes.

We will do this by:

- Supporting children and young people to make good progress in school through: tracking attainment; providing regular Personal Education Plans (PEPs); effective use of the Pupil Premium Grant to provide appropriate interventions; and maintaining stability of education placements;
- Supporting children and young people into positive destinations post 16; working closely with Further Education and Higher Education partner;
- Reducing the number of children in care and care leavers not in education, employment or training;
- Ensuring young people have appropriate support in schools and settings and have access to well-trained designated teachers; and
- Ensuring children in care and care leavers are supported to achieve at least the same, or higher rates of progress than their peers.

## ***Priority 3 – Accommodation including Placement Stability***

Children in care and care leavers are more likely to experience poorer outcomes if their care needs are not matched to the right placement at both a strategic and individual level.

We want all children in care to have placements that meet their social, health and educational needs and provide effective support to enable them to achieve their full potential.

We will do this by:

- Ensuring that we keep families together whenever possible;
- Developing the Children in Care Placements Commissioning Strategy and ensure appropriate linkages between the two strategies and action plans;
- Ensuring our children in care are matched with carers who are able to meet their needs;
- Ensuring foster carers are skilled to meet the needs of the children and young people who they care for;
- Ensuring there is appropriate support for placements to prevent the breakdown of the placement at an earlier stage;
- Ensure that life story work is completed with the young person;
- Ensure that Children in Care Reviews are held in accordance with procedure;
- Ensure that permanency plans for children in care are identified at the earliest opportunity;

- Ensure that care leavers are not placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation under 18 or if living in houses of multiple occupancy they have been offered a place in suitable accommodation;
- Further promoting the Staying Put and Shared Lives schemes; and
- Promoting the 'Foster to Adopt' scheme.

#### **Priority 4 - Transition to Independence**

Transition to independence for care leavers is a challenging time due to the disruption in their earlier lives and not necessarily having the appropriate skills to thrive when they become independent; such as confidence, responsibility, financial sense and personal hygiene.

We want to ensure that care leavers are able to develop the appropriate skills to live independently.

We will do this by:

- Developing a specific local Care Leaver Offer;
- Fully involving young people in their assessments, planning, review and decision making for leaving care;
- Providing ongoing personal support via personal advisors, Social Workers, carers and mentors;
- Helping young people to develop support networks including making friends and access to local clubs;
- Providing information and advice to promote educational achievement including access to college;
- Ensuring young people leaving care have access to a choice of independent and semi-independent accommodation and the support and skills to maintain themselves in their accommodation;
- Ensuring there is a contingency plan to support care leavers in the event of a crisis; and
- Supporting young people to access benefits when necessary.

In the words of a child in care:

*"What do we need to live independently? We need to develop confidence to take responsibility for ourselves and our actions, which in turn will improve our life skills in general and this will help maintain our accommodation. We need to ensure there is a plan to support us in the event of crisis; to support us to stay in familiar surroundings. The key to helping young people to successful outcomes and life chances is to ensure we make progress with each of the steps we take towards adulthood."*

## **9. OUR ROLE AS CORPORATE PARENTS**

Our responsibility in improving outcomes and actively promoting the life chances of children and young people that we look after has become known as corporate parenting, in recognition of the fact that the task must be shared by the whole council and partner agencies. Corporate

Parents take responsibility for the wellbeing and future outcomes of our children in care and care leavers.

Within the partnership the following key roles play an integral part of ensuring the progress of our children in care and care leavers:

- **Director of Children and Adult Services (DCAS)** – the DCAS will ensure that services for children in care and care leavers:
  - Support good parenting from every person involved in the child’s life;
  - Are planned and provided to take account of children and young people’s views so they have a say in the decisions that affect their future;
  - Provide children and young people with stability in their lives; and
  - Raise their aspirations by expecting the same of them as any parent would expect from their own children.

*(Statutory Guidance: The Roles and Responsibilities of the Lead member for Children’s Services and the Director of Children’s Services)*

The DCAS chairs the Corporate Parenting Strategic Group which has responsibility for ensuring the delivery of this strategy.

- **The Lead Member** - will support the DCAS to achieve the above and challenge progress when required.
- **Elected Members** have a ‘special responsibility. In 2003 the DfES published ‘If this were my child...A councillor’s guide to being a good corporate parent’ and all elected members in Telford & Wrekin Council have received a copy. Councillors who do not have a direct role with children should still exercise this responsibility in their ward work.
- **Officers & Stakeholders** - In Care Matters Time for Change (2007) the government state:

*“Every child needs a good parent who looks out for them, speaks out on their behalf and responds to their needs. For children in care, this is a statutory role for local authorities – all local councillors and council offices share the corporate parenting responsibility. This responsibility is paramount and councillors and council officers should carry it with them as they go about their daily business. They should also be clear about how, as corporate parents, they work with and support the Lead Member and Director of Children & Adult Services, in their strategic roles. However, it is not just local authorities that have a parenting role. In the same way that a family shares responsibility for bringing up their children with their extended family members, the corporate parenting responsibility must be shared by everyone involved in supporting children in care. This includes health bodies, education services such as schools and colleges, the police, youth and youth justice organisations, and the private and third sectors too. The response to the Care Matters green and white papers emphasised that unless this wide*

*range of partners accept their responsibilities, we will not make a difference to the lives of children in care.”*

- The Virtual School Head (VSH) is the lead responsible officer for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of Telford & Wrekin’s children in care, including those placed out-of-authority. The role of the VSH is to ensure that there are effective systems in place to ensure the educational achievement of children in care and care leavers.

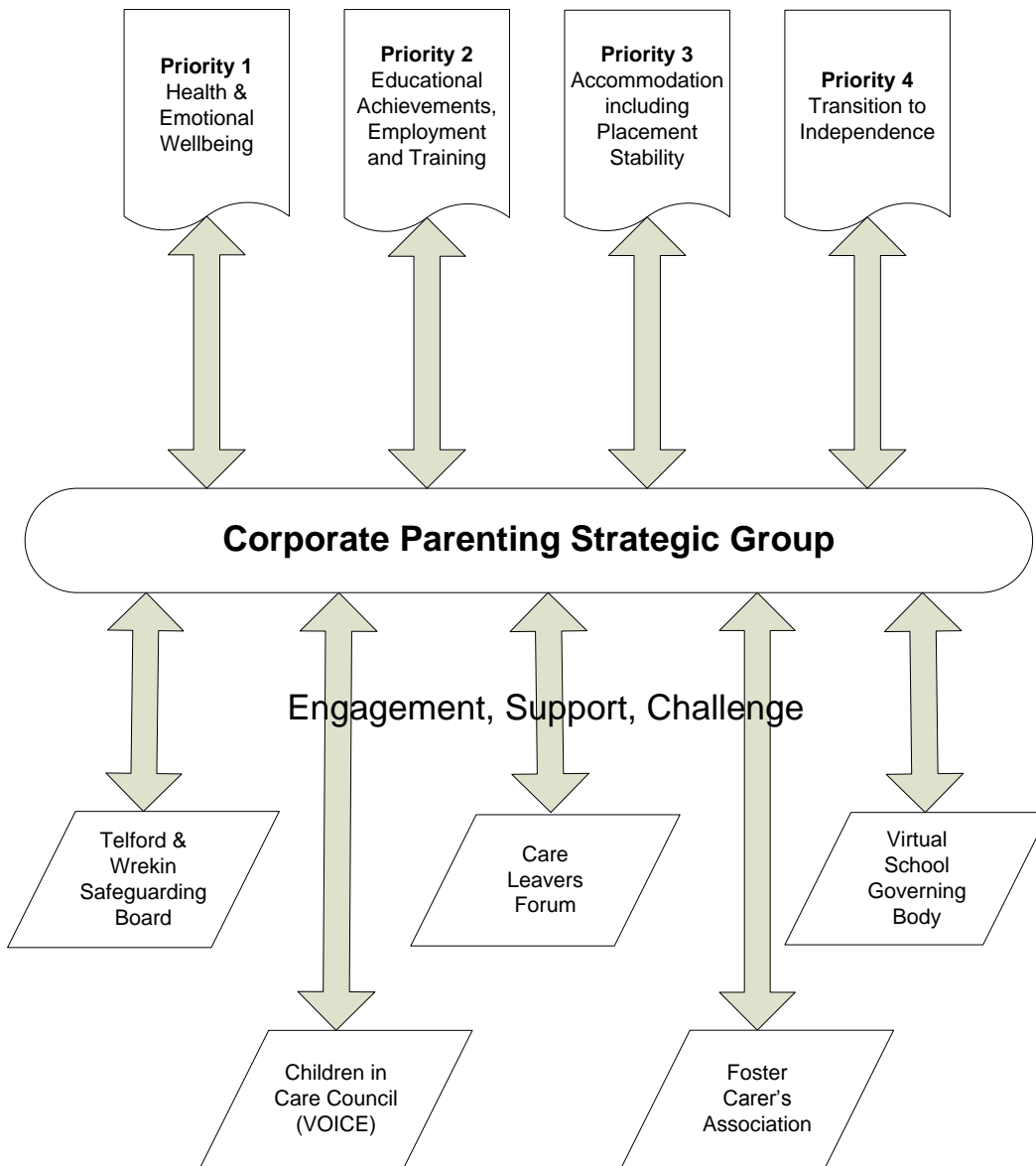
## **10. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS**

The Corporate Parenting Strategic Group (CPSG) is a strategic partnership which is committed to ensuring that the most vulnerable children and young people achieve more and are better prepared for adult life.

The CPSG will be held to account by the Care Council, VOICE, and the Care Leaver’s Forum. The CPSG will also be scrutinised by the Telford & Wrekin Council’s Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee when required.

The CPSG will draw upon support and challenge from Foster Carer’s Association and the Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board (TWSCB) to ensure that the Corporate Parenting Strategy effectively safeguards and promotes the welfare of our children in care and care leavers.

The Virtual School Governing Body acts as the governors for the Virtual School and ensures progress is made for children in care and care leavers in terms of education. This group is chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Adults. This group is accountable to the CPSG and will drive forward progress in terms of the educational priorities.



## 11. REFERENCES

**Care Matters: Time for Change, June 2007.**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-matters-time-for-change](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-matters-time-for-change)

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**Integrated inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after & care leavers & joint inspection of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.- February 2015.**

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**Statutory Guidance: Director/Lead Member for children’s services: roles and responsibilities – April 2013**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/directors-of-childrens-services-roles-and-responsibilities](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/directors-of-childrens-services-roles-and-responsibilities)

**Care Leavers Strategy, October 2013**

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/266484/Care\\_Leaver\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266484/Care_Leaver_Strategy.pdf)

**National Statistics: Children looked after in England, including adoption**

[www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption--2)

**Keeping Children safe in Education. Statutory guidance for schools and colleges – March 2015**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2)

**Children and Social Work Act 2017**

[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents/enacted](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents/enacted)

**Applying corporate parenting principles to care and pathway planning, Statutory guidance for local authorities – consultation document (DRAFT – October 2017)**

### SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- Children in Care Placements – Fostering Strategy 2017
- Telford & Wrekin Community Strategy “Shaping Our Future – Our Journey to 2020”