



LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Shropshire Corporate Parenting Strategy 2016-18

**Revised May 2016
Next revision: May 2018**



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Charter for Children in Care & Care Leavers

The council should use these priorities when they are making decisions that will affect young people's lives. This document aims to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what the council should do to be good corporate parents. This charter will try to ensure that all children in care and care leavers have equal access to services, support and life opportunities.

My Health

Offer me advice and opportunities to help me be healthy. Give me easy and open access to health services, including sexual and mental health.

Education, Work and Training

Provide me with a suitable education, a budget if I choose to go onto university, and help seeking employment, training or education. Shropshire Council should continue to provide young people in care the chance to do work experience with the council as if it was the 'family firm'.

My Social Life

Make my life fun! Provide opportunities and activities for me to take part in.

Support

Support me in my endeavours. Offer me practical and financial support. Give me access safe people to turn to when I am upset or angry, and the chance to talk things through with someone who is not part of the council.

Inform Me

Explain to me what my rights are. Tell me what I'm entitled to and what I can ask for at different points of my life. Give me clear information about myself and my time in care when I want it.

Generally

Respect me and treat me fairly, and as an individual. Be honest and don't make promises you can't keep. Do your best to promote children in care and make sure they don't get a bad name. Acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of children in care.

My Voice

Listen to my views and opinions. Put my needs and feelings at the heart of all decisions about me. Ask me what I think and I want to do. If you don't agree then tell me why.

My Home

Give me carers who are people-friendly and a home that is appropriate to my individual needs. Offer me a home where I can be safe and happy, not just a bed. Don't forget about me if I live far from home. Help me to move onto independent living when I am ready.

Moving On

Plan for the future with me clearly, and be ready to put support in place if things go wrong. Prepare me before it's time to move on, with things like life skills, cooking, driving and money management.



www.safeguardingshropshireschildren.org.uk/lac

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1.1 Foreword

Every professional who works with looked after children and care leavers has the responsibility of a corporate parent. This can be a social worker, councilor or other professionals who work in police, health, housing, probation and education. Being a corporate parent means providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by the council. A looked after child looks to the whole council to be the best parent that it can be to that child

This strategy sets out Shropshire Council's vision and commitment and explains how we, as the Council, will be an effective and trustworthy corporate parent for any child or young person who is in our care irrespective of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or disability.

Every good parent knows that children require a safe and secure environment in which to grow and thrive. Parents protect and support their children against the dangers and risks of life. Parents are ambitious for them and want them to reach their potential. Parents celebrate and share in their achievements.

A child who is cared for by the Council has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a good parent.

This means as a Council we will:



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- Know our children, their needs, talents and aspirations and promote their interests
- Hold high aspirations for their future and expect the best for and from them
- Take an interest in their successes and problems and show our pride in their achievements, and celebrate them
- Listen to their views and ensure they influence practice, service developments and policy.
- Ensure they are consulted about their own lives and plans
- Recognise, support and respect their identity in all aspects
- Ensure our children attend their education regularly
- Promote and support high academic achievement by working with our schools and carers to ensure that the needs of our children are understood and met
- Support their health and emotional well-being and resilience
- Support transition to adult life and promote their economic prospects & prepare them to become responsible citizens **and most importantly....** as Corporate Parents we will preface all our thinking, planning, actions and decisions with:

“would this be good enough for my child.....”

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For Corporate Parenting to be effective it needs a commitment from all elected members and council employees in a council-wide approach as well as from partner agencies who work to support the best interests of looked after children. It involves the whole council and its partners acting as a good parent, committing resources and working together to improve the lives of all children and young people in care and care leavers. It is about prioritising their needs, listening to what they want and supporting them to make the most of their lives.

Professionals with responsibility for looked after children meet on a regular basis to discuss the important issues involving looked after children and care leavers in Shropshire and to identify what further work or action is needed to support and help our looked after children succeed in life. This is called a Corporate Parenting Panel and young people from the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum attend to report directly to the panel on issues impacting directly on looked after children. This ensures all corporate parents fully understand the key issues for looked after children so that they can consider what action they themselves or their agency can take to promote the best interests of looked after children. The Corporate Parent Panel will identify actions to be taken, set priorities and will hold agencies to account to ensure all agencies are effective corporate parents. Please refer to Appendix 1.

1.2 Context

Shropshire Council aims to support the majority of its children and young people within their own families and communities. However for a small number this is not possible and they require alternative short term or long term care.

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Children and young people are in care either by a Court Order made in public law proceedings or with the agreement of the child's parent or guardian. A child or young person may come into care as a result of temporary or permanent problems facing their parents, as a result of abuse or neglect or a range of difficulties; those in shared care/respice arrangements; those remanded into care – criminal proceedings and unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Corporate parenting responsibilities extend to the age of 21 years (or 25 if remaining in education) for those young people who left care at 18 years.

Shropshire Council is committed to finding children and young people a permanent family. If this cannot be within the child's own extended family then Shropshire Council is committed to securing each individual child or young person with a permanent placement. This reinforces our view that permanency provides the best environment for children to feel safe and secure which will enable them to achieve happy and fulfilling lives.

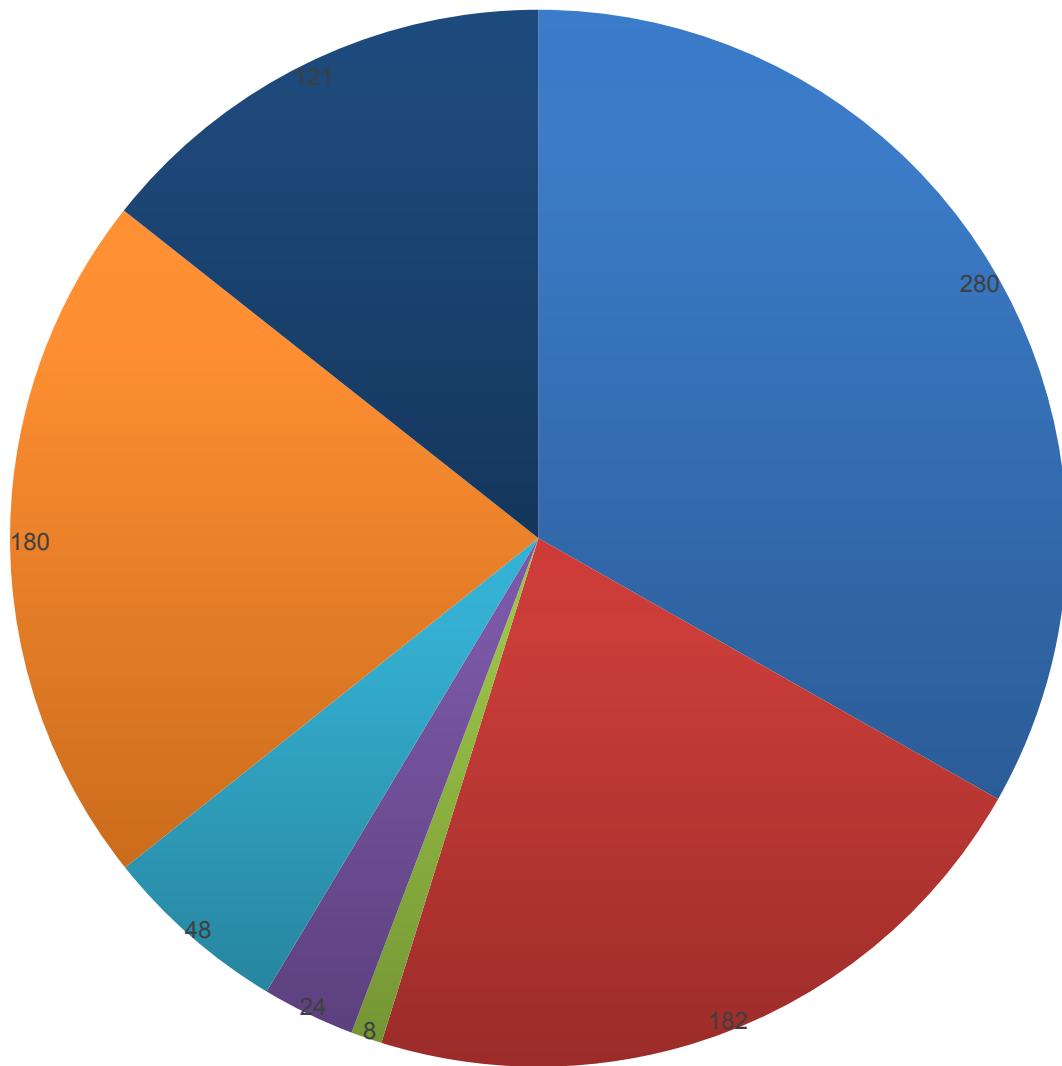
Children and young people in care are individuals, come from all walks of life and have different aspirations, ambitions and cultural identities.

Many looked after children are at greater risk of social exclusion than their non-looked after peers, both because of their experiences prior to coming into care, and by virtue of the fact that they are in care. It is essential, therefore, that the Council, as a Corporate Parent, ensures that their experience of being in care is a positive and supportive one and maximizes their full potential.

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Shropshire Children In Care Snapshot as at 1st April 2016



- Children looked after by the council
- Children placed with foster carers (61 of whom are with relatives & friends who are assessed as foster carers)
- Children placed for adoption
- Children placed at home with parents
- Children placed in residential care
- Children are in the care of the council through a legal order
- Young people are care leavers aged between 18-24 still in receipt of statutory services

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A good corporate parent must offer the same as any good parent and improving the role of the corporate parent is key to improving all outcomes for our children. This relies on addressing the difficulties children and young people in care experience and the challenges of parenting within a complex system of different services. It is also important that the children and young people themselves have the opportunity to shape and influence the parenting they receive.

While good parenting requires continuity, organisations by their nature are continuously changing. Elected members and employees move on and structures, procedures and partnerships are modified and refined. One challenge of being a good corporate parent is to manage these changes and ensuring each individual child and young person has the opportunity to maintain a sense of stability.

We need to make sure that children and young people 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.

Care Matters: The Ministerial Stocktake Report 2009 (DCSF) commented that:

“A key commitment is to put the voice of the child in care at the heart of the care system. All parents take children’s wishes and feelings into account when making day to day decisions about their lives and corporate parents need to do the same.”

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child became international law in 1990. It provides an internationally agreed framework of minimum standards necessary for the well-being of all

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children and young people. These principles need to apply to children in care and care leavers and most importantly need to be championed by their corporate parents.

1.3 Our Vision and Underlying Values

Our vision mirrors that in “Care Matters: Time to deliver for children in care” DCSF 2008:

“Our aspirations for children in care reflect those we would have for our own children. We know they are often in much greater need than other children and we must ensure they obtain all the help they require. We aim to create a home and community environment that provides every child with a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to meet their full potential”

So, we want to

- A. be confident as Corporate Parents that we know what it is like to be a child in the care of Shropshire Council;
- B. act as **Corporate Family** and engaging fully our partners in this role;
- C. provide opportunities to help our children and young people (for whom we have Corporate Parenting responsibilities) meet our pledge.

1.4 Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum

Shropshire’s Children in Care Council seeks to represent and promote the views, opinions and experiences of Shropshire’s Looked after Children. Young people and care leavers. In order to

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influence the development of services provided by Shropshire Council and its partners. The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum brings together representatives of Shropshire's Looked after Children, young people and care leavers to share their views, opinions, ideas and experiences in order to improve services provided by Shropshire Council and its partners. The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum works in partnership with Shropshire's Corporate Parenting panel, Shropshire Council and providers of services to develop and shape policies and proposals that affect Shropshire's Looked after Children, young people and care leavers.

1.5 Shropshire's Children's Charter

There is a children's charter in place which was produced with our children and young people in 2013. This charter is in the process of being reviewed with the children and young people. This charter is widely available across the Council and relates to 9 key areas that are important to looked after children;

- Health
- Education, work and training
- Social life
- Support
- Inform me
- Moving on
- My home
- My voice
- General issues

The Corporate parenting Panel, the council and elected members have signed up to this charter.

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1.6 Aims and Objectives of the Strategy

Corporate Parenting operates at strategic, operational and individual levels. Its 3 key elements are:

- **A statutory duty** detailed in the Children Act 1989; Children and Young Persons Act 2008 on all parts of a local authority to co-operate in promoting the welfare of children and young people in care and a duty on other partners and agencies to cooperate in fulfilling that duty;
- **Co-ordinating the activities** of the many different professionals and carers who are involved in a child or young person's life and taking a strategic, child-centred approach to the delivery of services;
- **Shifting the emphasis from 'corporate' to 'parenting' which** means doing what a good parent would do to promote and support the physical, emotional, social and cognitive development of a child from infancy to adulthood.

The objective of this Strategy is to ensure the Corporate Parenting responsibilities for all elected members and council employees are clearly outlined so that:

- **Elected members** have a clear understanding and awareness of the needs of our children in care and care leavers and ensure their responsibilities as corporate parents are reflected in all aspects of the Council's work.



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- **All services play a part** in delivering Corporate Parenting and continually monitoring and reviewing what their services contribute to improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers.
- **The Corporate Family activity** leads to measurable improvement in the life chances of children in care and care leavers so these are in line with their peers.
- **Communication** between elected members and children in care and care leavers ensures they have a say in how decisions are made about services affecting them and are able to influence those decisions.
- **Partnership working and joint planning** and commissioning is promoted as an effective means of delivering effective services.

1.7 How the Strategy will be taken forward

Elected Members

All elected members have to ensure that public services used or required by children and young people in care are of a high quality, integrated and take account of need. They must ensure they are fully informed of the issues facing children in care by understanding their characteristics and by knowing how well services are performing in meeting their assessed needs. This requires an awareness and understanding of:

- Care and placement arrangements;



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- Child protection and safety policies and procedures;
- Education performance and achievements in school;
- Further and Higher Education, training and employment achievements;
- Responsiveness of health services;
- Preparation for leaving care arrangements and housing need;
- Arrangements to prevent children in care from getting into trouble.

Elected members will be supported in meeting their responsibilities by relevant council officers. They will provide leadership that will encourage and support partnership and joined-up working. This will ensure that funding, commissioning and priority setting deliver the best combination of services for children and young people in care and care leavers.

Shropshire Council Departments and Partners

One of the most important contributions that Shropshire Council can collectively make to Corporate Parenting is how they, as the “family firm” can deliver better employability opportunities for children and young people in care and care leavers. “Employability” refers to a wide range of activities and includes apprenticeships, work experience, and work placements. These opportunities are designed to:



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- help young people meet their potential and achieve their abilities, hopes and aspirations;
- help them become confident individuals;
- give them a taste of the world of work;
- broaden their horizons from little or no experience of employment options;
- and help them become economically and socially positively contributing citizens.

Children's Services

Foster Carers will be assessed, approved, supervised and supported to ensure that they:

- Provide a safe, secure and comfortable home for the children and young people they care for.
- Give children and young people time and attention and clear boundaries.
- Provide encouragement and motivation to help children and young people meet their potential.
- Work positively with birth parents and other family members where appropriate.



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- Work in partnership with those who share responsibility for the child or young person's care, welfare and development.
- Provide care that supports and promotes the child or young person's culture, race, religion, language, disability and sexual orientation.
- This will apply equally to all carers including Shropshire in-house foster carers, Independent Fostering Agency foster carers and **children's residential social care staff**.

Social Workers and other social care staff should:

- Ensure that each child and young person's needs are thoroughly assessed and that these are properly represented in their Care and Pathway Plans.
- Have the key role in care planning for children and young people in care and care leavers. First consideration will be given to returning the child or young person to their parent's or other family member's care when safe to do so. Where this is not achievable efforts will be made to secure the child with an alternative family such as adoption or foster care. Where a child or young person remains in care plans will also address leaving care arrangements.
- Listen to the views and wishes of the child or young person and those of their family members where appropriate. The views of those involved in providing services to children in care will also be sought.



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- Ensure each child or young person is healthy and their health needs are appropriately assessed and met.
- Ensure each child or young person is safely and securely accommodated within formalised family arrangements or in appropriate care placements.
- Ensure they have access to and are supported in a full range of educational services, whether this is in schools, colleges or specialist alternative provision.
- Ensure they have access to leisure and sports facilities which enable their interests, skills confidence and self-esteem to develop.
- Ensure that they make a smooth and successful transition from living in care to adulthood.

The Virtual School for Children in Care is responsible for providing strategic direction and targeted support and securing successful educational outcomes for all children and young people in care and will:

- Support children and young people in care in School Years 1-13 which will include working with carers, Social Workers, Schools, Special Educational Needs, other Council teams and external agencies.
- Monitor performance of educational attainment and progress across all Key Stages and assist and support with the statutory

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completion of Personal Education Plans

- Facilitate Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings
- Advise, monitor and report on all matters regarding admissions, attendance and exclusions of children and young people in care. No looked after child should be permanently excluded without consultation with the Virtual Scholl Head Teacher.
- Provide training for carers, designated teachers and designated governors.
- ***And above all, promote and improve the educational attainment of children and young people in care.***

1.8 Going Forward

As Corporate parents we are keen to understand the issues that impact on our looked after children. We are keen to develop further our understanding of what it means to be a looked after child in Shropshire by developing different ways of engaging with and listening to our looked after children. We also want to ensure that as corporate parents we have a full understanding of the looked after children agenda. We will therefore look to have themed areas at each Corporate Parenting Panel so that there can be a drill down into specific groups of looked after children or issues that affect looked after children. A review of Corporate Parenting Panel functioning and scope will take place.



Appendices

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Appendix 1

Corporate Parenting Panel

The Corporate Parenting Panel will act as an advisory and consultative body to the Council, its partners and its Committees and other strategic groups (SSCB \ Children's Trust \ Health and Well-being Board) and will provide robust challenge to ensure that Corporate Parenting duties are carried out effectively and consistently. It will ensure that the outcomes and life chances of children in care and care leavers are improved so they are in line with their peers and will act as the champion for these children and young people. It is the role of the Corporate Parenting Panel will set the priorities for children in care and to monitor and scrutinise service delivery. It will also:

- Ensure that the commitments outlined in the Shropshire's Charter for Children in Care and Care Leavers are delivered.
- Oversee the implementation of this strategy with delegated responsibilities to Heads of Service or Senior Managers within all Departments and partner agencies.
- Monitor the delivery of good, safe, high quality services through quality assurance and performance management frameworks.

Requirements

The leadership and governance of the Corporate Parenting Panel must be clear in relation to the Panel's power to deploy resources and hold officers to account.

Individual panel members must be trained and prepared for their task, and be clear about the authority they carry.

The relationship of the Corporate Parenting Panel to other Boards, partnership arrangements and scrutiny committees must be clear.

The Corporate Parenting Panel must have access to robust qualitative and quantitative management information in order to effectively monitor performance against outcomes and track delivery of Pledge commitments.

The Corporate Parenting Panel will, therefore, receive quarterly reports on a range of local and national performance indicators in relation to children in care e.g. health, education, participation, and inspection outcomes.

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Panel Membership

The Corporate Parenting Panel will be chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People, and will meet quarterly

Membership will consist of Councillors, Director of Children Services, Head of Service for Children Services, Senior Officers, Children and Young People in and leaving care, and partner agencies such as Health and Police.

The involvement of young people on the Panel will be essential to inform current and future priorities and decisions relating to children in care.

Terms of Reference:

- Provide a forum for Children in Care to influence policy, service developments, practice, etc. so that there is continuous improvement;
- Take a strategic overview of Shropshire Council's and partner agencies responsibilities towards Children in Care;
- Scrutinise service delivery in order to satisfy ourselves that there is joined up, effective and holistic approach to meeting the needs of looked after children and care leavers.
- Commit to listen to the views of looked after children, young people and care leavers.
- Ensure looked after children, young people and care leavers are considered in the development of all policy and service provision that might impact on them.
- Attend events that recognize and celebrate the achievements and successes of looked after children, young people and care leavers.
- Meet with children and young people through participation groups
- Ensure that relevant new initiatives, plans, policies and service developments are presented to the Panel for consultation.
- Challenge practice and ways of working and the delivery of services where required
- Understand the needs of Shropshire's looked after population, including data relating to;
 - How many looked after children, young people and care leavers there are
 - How many the local authority is looking after
 - How well we are achieving permanency for children in a timely way
 - How well looked after children, young people and care leavers are doing at school, college or university and what needs to be done to improve educational outcomes
 - What the health needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers are and how these are being met



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- What advocacy or children's services are available
- What are the housing needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers and how are these being met?
- What support is available to care leavers

Support to the Corporate Parenting Panel: will be provided by the PA to the Head of Service

Accountability: Chair to report to the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive or DCS

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee: will be represented on the board by elected members. Board will receive relevant reports and Recommendations for information, planning and monitoring purposes.

Relationship with the Safeguarding Board: Should have the work programme of the Corporate Parenting Board and reports should be provided to the Safeguarding Board through the Service Manager of Looked After Service – Reports are for information only

Relationship with Children's Trust: The Corporate Parenting panel will provide bi-annual reports to the Children's Trust. The reports will be for information only to update progress and improvements made in the key outcome areas for looked after children, young people and care leavers in Shropshire.

The logo for Shropshire Looked After Children is composed of ten interlocking puzzle pieces arranged in a horizontal line. Each piece contains a letter of the word 'SHROPSHIRE'. The pieces are colored in a gradient from blue on the left to pink on the right. Below the puzzle pieces, the words 'LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN' are written in a bold, sans-serif font, with the colors of the puzzle pieces repeated for each word: 'LOOKED' in blue, 'AFTER' in purple, and 'CHILDREN' in pink.

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Appendix 2

Key Structures/posts

- **Lead Member for Children’s Services.** This individual has *political* responsibility for the leadership, strategy and effectiveness of local authority children’s services.
- **Director of Children’s Services.** This person has *professional* responsibility for the leadership, strategy and effectiveness of local authority children’s services.
- **Independent Reviewing Officers.** IROs are responsible for reviewing and monitoring each looked after child’s case and care plan and challenging poor practice. They must be qualified social workers and independent from the line management of the child’s case.
- **Social Workers.** Each looked after child must have a qualified social worker allocated to them, responsible for developing and implementing their care plan.
- **Residential and foster carers.** Each looked after child should be provided with a placement to live in that is best able to keep them safe and meet their needs. This can be with foster carers, in residential care or a more specialist setting if their needs are complex.
- **Kinship carers.** Some looked after children are placed with family or friends, sometimes known as ‘kinship carers’ or **Connected Person Carers**.
- **Adopters.** Where it is decided that a child cannot be cared for by their own family, it is important that a permanent alternative home is provided. This may be through adoption, where the adoptive family acquires full parental responsibility and the child ceases to be looked after once an adoption order is made.
- **Special guardians.** Where a child has significant ties with someone other than a parent who is looking after them, such as a relative or foster carer, that person can be given parental responsibility through a special guardianship order. This means that they will bring the child up, and the child is no longer looked after, but the child is not part of their family in the same way as an adopted child.
- **Independent visitors.** Every looked after child is entitled to have an independent visitor – an adult completely outside the care system who can befriend them. This is especially useful for children who have little or no contact with their family.
- **Advocates.** An advocate has a more specific role than that of an independent visitor, in that they support the child’s participation in decision-making and make sure that their voice is heard. They may accompany children to review meetings if the child requests it.



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- **Personal advisors.** Young people entitled to services as a care-leaver must be allocated a personal advisor to act as a focal point for planning their transition to adulthood. The role is not the same as that of a social worker and personal advisors will continue to offer support after the young person has left care.
- **Children in Care Council.** Local authorities are required to establish a Children in Care Council to represent the views of looked after children to those responsible for the service.
- **Participation workers.** Many local authorities have created specific posts, or contracted local voluntary sector partners, to support children's participation in the Children in Care Council or to seek their views in other ways.
- **Corporate parenting group/panel.** Although not a statutory requirement, most local authorities have established a group of elected members to oversee the corporate parenting function of the local authority.
- **Children's Trusts.** These are partnership arrangements bringing together children's services within a local authority area. They are no longer mandatory but, if not established, alternative mechanisms to work in partnership need to be in place.
- **Health and well-being boards.** A forum for key leaders from the health and social care system to work together to improve the health and well-being of the local population and reduce health inequalities. As a group at risk of poor health, it will be important to ensure that the needs of looked after children and care-leavers form part of their remit. It will also be important to clarify links with the Children's Trust or other bodies responsible for children's services.
- **Virtual school head.** The Children and Families Act 2014 made it a statutory duty for all English Local Authorities to appoint a SENIOR OFFICER (Virtual Head Teacher) with the responsibility and purpose of promoting the educational attainments of looked after children. This will involve working with a range of partners including schools, social workers, carers, members and senior local authority officers to strategically and operationally promote the educational opportunities and attainments for looked after children in Shropshire. The virtual school head or equivalent will collate information about the attainment of looked after children as if they were in a single school, and to provide challenge and support to help them make progress.
- **Designated teachers.** Every maintained school is required to appoint a designated teacher to promote the educational achievement of looked after children.
- **Designated doctors and nurses for looked after children.** These individuals have a strategic role that is separate from the direct service they may offer to individual children. Different local areas operate different models but it is important that, whichever model is used, arrangements are in place to enable



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the designated professionals to have an impact on the commissioning of health services for looked after children.

- **Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).** Dedicated provision is required for looked after children. In some authorities this has led to the creation of specialist teams; in others it has been interpreted more narrowly.
- **Clinical Commissioning Groups.** These bodies and the local authority should agree joint action on the health needs of looked after children in their area and develop a joint commissioning strategy.
- **The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP).** This is not mandatory but can serve to describe the aspirations for all children in an area. If the local authority has such a plan, it is useful to ensure that looked after children are identified as a group requiring specific services.
- **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.** The JSNA is the process for identifying the current and future health and well-being needs of a local population, leading to agreed commissioning priorities that will improve outcomes and reduce health inequalities.
- **Director of Public Health.** The Director should be examining the health outcomes of looked after children to ensure that steps are taken to reduce inequalities.