

ACHIEVING THE BEST FOR OUR CHILDREN

Herefordshire's
Corporate Parenting Strategy
2020 - 2023

Foreword

Many care experienced children, young people, and care leavers face difficult situations and challenges in their lives that could lead to disadvantage both now, and later in life without the right care, stability and support. In Herefordshire we are strongly committed to our role as corporate parents and fully recognise the role we play in providing positive opportunities and enabling our young people to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Your Voice Matters, Herefordshire's Children in Care Council, have shared their views and experiences with us, enabling us to work together to identify the key changes needed locally. They have made valuable proposals for how we can better address their needs and expectations, including work on promoting 'language that cares'. Their voice truly matters if we are to support and enable them to achieve the education, training and work they aspire to.

Working in partnership with organisations across Herefordshire, alongside children and young people we aim to be the best parent we can be. We want children and young people with experience of care or leaving care to be safe, healthy, to aim high, and to be a key part of our local community, the same as we would wish for our own children.

At the time of writing we are facing an unprecedented global public health crisis, which has impacted on all of our lives in many different ways. I am extremely impressed by the creative ways in which our children and young people have shared their experiences, concerns and thoughts on the coronavirus pandemic and the limitations it has placed on us as communities and as individuals, and made valuable proposals including better ways of keeping in touch, and an investigation into encouraging positive mental health.

This strategy not only sets out our key objectives as corporate parents, working alongside our partners and young people themselves, but also recognises the additional actions we need to take to ensure our children and young people can build bright futures in light of the additional economic, social and environmental challenges we currently face.

I am delighted to be leading member support to deliver this strategy, and in making sure that children and young people are at the centre of its delivery.

Cllr Norman
Lead Member for Children and Young People
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel

Introduction

‘Corporate Parenting’ means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies to give care experienced children, young people and adults (care leavers) the best start in life. A child in the care of the council should expect the whole council to be the best parent it can be. Every member and employee of the council has the statutory responsibility to act for a looked after child in the same way that a good parent would act for their own child.

Every good parent wants the best for their child - to see their child flourish, to enjoy good health, to be safe and happy, to do well at school, to enjoy good relationships with their peers, to make the most of leisure opportunities, hobbies and interests, and to grow towards adulthood equipped to lead independent lives and to make their way as happy, healthy, successful and financially secure adults.

Herefordshire’s Children & Young People’s Plan 2019 – 2024 makes four pledges to all children and young people which are:

1. Keeping children and young people safe – BE SAFE FROM HARM
2. Improving children and young people’s health and wellbeing – BE HEALTHY
3. Helping ALL children and young people succeed – BE AMAZING
4. Ensuring that children and young people are influential in our communities – FEEL PART OF THE COMMUNITY

The role of corporate parent extends beyond children’s social care. It is the responsibility of each elected Councillor, every member of staff and wider partner agencies to enable children in the council’s care to lead happy and fulfilled lives.

Being a good corporate parent means we should:

- accept responsibility for children in the council’s care
- make their needs a priority
- seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.

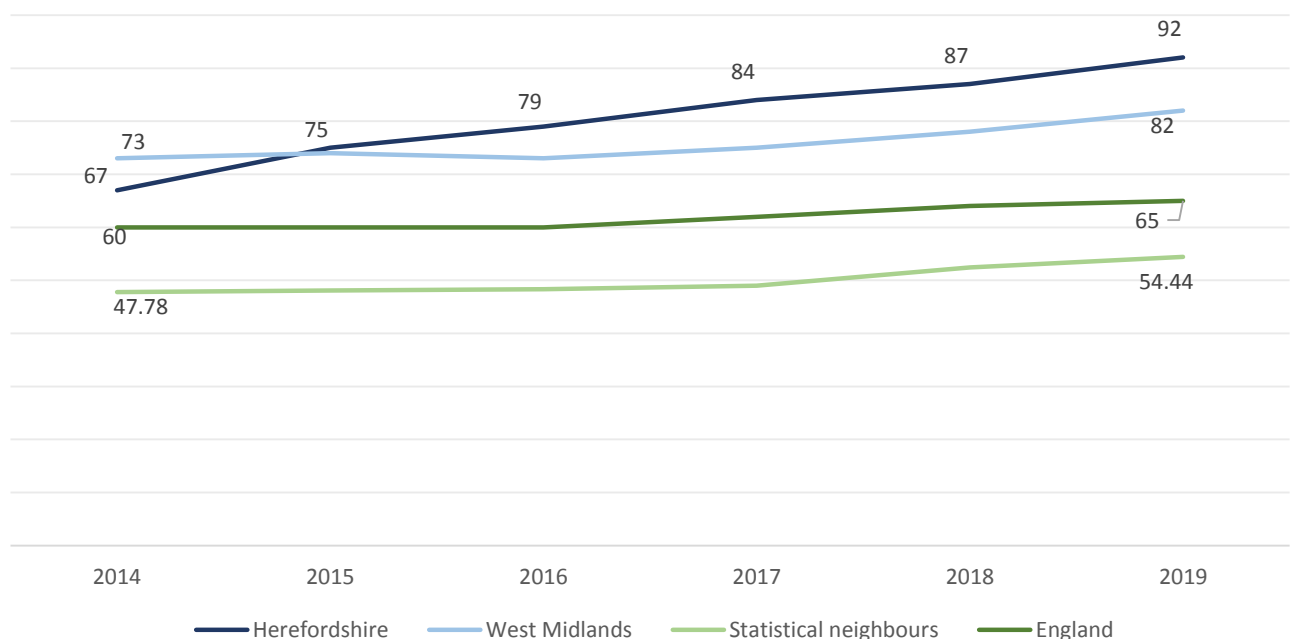
This strategy sets out our commitment to work together to improve outcomes for care experienced children and young people, and care experienced adults for whom we all have a special responsibility.

We have worked alongside ‘Your Voice Matters’, Herefordshire’s Children in Care Council, to identify key priorities and to develop actions that will lead to positive change for our children and young people.

The National and Local Picture

The number of care experienced children and young people in Herefordshire has risen year on year since 2014, from 242 to 352 in 2020. However when considering the rates (per 10,000 population) of care experienced children and young people, Herefordshire is consistently higher than our statistical neighbours, other West Midlands authorities and indeed nationally.

Care experienced children (per 10,000 population) - trends



Many children in our care have faced real challenges in their lives and deserve care, support and stability to make sure they have every chance of achieving in life rather than facing ongoing disadvantage.

Research suggests that care experienced children can have poorer outcomes in terms of education, physical and mental health¹, are more likely to go missing, putting them at greater risk of abuse or exploitation², and care leavers are less likely to be in education employment or training.

¹ Rahilly and Hendry, 2014

² All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked after Children and Care Leavers, 2012.

The gap between Herefordshire's looked after children and 'all' Herefordshire Children

Year	Key Stage 1 percentage point gap achieving the expected standard Reading, Writing and Maths	Key Stage 2 percentage point gap achieving the expected standard Reading, Writing and Maths	Key Stage 4 Attainment 8 gap in scores	Key Stage 4 Progress 8 gap in scores
2017	50.6	23.5	21.3	0.98
2018	49.1	45.6	28.3	1.38
2019	6.1	19.3	20.6	0.55

Care Leavers in suitable accommodation (%)

Local Authority, Region and England	2017	2018	2019	2020
Herefordshire	70.00	76.00	80.00	94%
West Midlands	82.00	84.00	85.00	unknown
Statistical Neighbours	86.44	85.89	86.13	unknown
England	84.00	84.00	85.00	unknown

Care leavers who were in education, training or employment (%)

Local Authority, Region and England	2017	2018	2019	2020
Herefordshire	29.00	38.00	44.00	42.60
West Midlands	46.00	50.00	51.00	unknown
Statistical Neighbours	52.56	52.56	53.44	unknown
England	50.00	51.00	52.00	unknown

In Herefordshire we have made year on year improvements in securing suitable accommodation for care leavers. Whilst the proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training has increased Herefordshire is below regional, national and statistical neighbours and we are committed to further improving our performance during the lifetime of this strategy.

Achievements and challenges

Alongside Your Voice Matters (YVM), the Corporate Parenting Panel have undertaken a review of progress against priorities set for 2016 – 2019:

Commitment to corporate parenting:

Over the last three years a number of actions have been undertaken to raise awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities with Council members and staff, and various opportunities for supporting care experienced children have been identified. Difficulties have been experienced however in converting some of these opportunities into action, and there is a need for partner agencies to fulfil their duties at a more strategic level. It has also been hard to measure impact.

Preventing need for care:

Although there is a strong partnership commitment to the council's early help offer, and successes in achieving sustainable change for vulnerable families, Herefordshire has experienced a continual rise in the number of looked after children. This is a trend experienced nationally.

Providing a safe and stable home:

Children in care in Herefordshire have a good level of placement stability in comparison with other authorities. Enhanced adoption support arrangements put in place during 2019 has increased the potential for securing successful adoption arrangements. There are improvements in the way we can assess and support children at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation and there is a new contextual safeguarding team in place which has enabled a more detailed understanding of prevalence and risk for care experienced children and adults. However securing enough foster placements against a backdrop of rising demand, and improving stability of placements are ongoing challenges.

Education:

Quality of personal education plans have increased, care leavers have greater access to IT in order to support study, and in terms of attainment, there is a narrowing gap between looked after children and all Herefordshire children at key stages. Areas of challenge include school exclusions, securing of consistent placements (reducing the need for school moves) a need to further improve personal education plans, and to further raise attainment and aspirations of care experienced young people.

Health:

Timeliness of health assessments have improved and a review of paperwork intends to strengthen the voice of the child, there has been an expansion of Children in care nurse capacity, and a new pilot is hoped to improve access to CAMHS. Further work is needed to recognise broader health and wellbeing needs, to develop better communication channels, develop trust (i.e. reassurance relating to disclosures), and to provide better health history information to care leavers.

Sport, Leisure and Culture:

Whilst there are various mechanisms to support care leavers to access appropriate opportunities (e.g. discounted leisure passes), resource pressures have impeded progress in this area, and more focus is needed on developing relationships with key local organisations to support access and increase opportunities.

Voice of care experienced children and adults:

Your Voice Matters (YVM) has a raised profile, and has actively encouraged new members to attend. There is an awareness of the Corporate parenting role, and tools such as 'Mind of My Own' are in place to gather views and experiences. YVM have links with other children in care councils and attend a number of local forums to ensure their views are represented. Challenges have included a consistent approach to YVM involvement in Panels and Cllr involvement in YVM meetings, the effective sharing of information produced by YVM, and ensuring that contributions have made a demonstrable difference.

Leaving care:

There is an increasing use of supported accommodation, including the development of accommodation for care leavers with complex needs, numbers not in education, employment or training has reduced, increased accessibility of the 16+ team, a council tax exemption has been introduced and there is improved partnership working with the DWP, housing solutions, probation and YOS. However the quality of some supported accommodation and ability to support care leavers locally needs to be improved, the numbers of NEET need to be reduced further, and a programme focussing on independent living skills has not been progressed.

Progress over the last three years, alongside a review of key statistics for Herefordshire and further input from YVM have shaped our seven new priorities and key actions for 2020 – 2024:

What do care experienced children and young people want?

1. We want our corporate parents, and other key leaders to understand and act on their responsibilities
2. We want to have a safe and stable home
3. We want to reach our potential in education
4. We want to be physically and emotionally healthy
5. We want to enjoy a range of play, sport, leisure and cultural opportunities
6. We want our voice to matter
7. When leaving care we want to live happy, healthy and financially secure lives

Delivering the strategy

Each of the seven priorities has an allocated lead, who will work alongside a YVM representative to take forward the relevant actions. The lead is responsible for reporting progress to the Corporate Parenting panel chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Families. The Panel includes representatives from:

- Your Voice Matters,
- Political group representatives,
- Herefordshire Council (incl. the Director for Children and Families).
- Herefordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
- Wye Valley Trust
- Foster Carer representatives

In addition, progress will be reported to Cabinet on an annual basis.

What do care experienced children and young people want?	How will we make this happen?	How will we know it has been successful?
1. We want our corporate parents, and other key leaders to understand and act on their responsibilities Lead – Lead Member for Children and Young People	All councillors to receive corporate parenting training and to commit to individual actions to support care experienced children and young people	Revised Councillor pledges, and annual evidence of progress. Delivery of the Care Leavers Covenant
	Corporate parents, council staff and partners will champion the child's voice and celebrate their achievements	YVM report that they are listened to. Councillors, council staff and partners engage with and seek views of care experienced and care leavers in their decision making. Evidence via board reporting. Evidenced actions to celebrate achievements
2. We want to have a safe and stable home Lead – Head of Looked After Children	We will recruit enough foster carers so children in care can live locally – close to their family, friends and school.	Increased bed nights for in house fostering and independent fostering agencies. Reduction in the number of children placed out of County. Improved placement stability
	We will provide training and support to build resilience of foster carers so that they are better able to meet the needs of children and young people in care	Evaluation of training and surveys of foster carers
	Children and young people in care are safe	Children who go missing Numbers at risk of exploitation

What do care experienced children and young people want?	How will we make this happen?	How will we know it has been successful?
3.a. We want to reach our potential in education	Scrutinise progress and attainment, challenging schools to ensure target grades are achieved.	Increased proportion achieving target grades
	Providing training to schools to better understand care experience children and reduce exclusions	Reduced exclusion rates
	Increase the range of opportunities for vulnerable learners post 16	Reduced number of care experienced who are NEET
	Develop an 'Aspirations programme'	Increase in numbers attending university
3.b. We want our education and training to 'recover' after the disruption of Covid 19	Work closely with schools, colleges and training providers to support you to return to education and training and catch up on missed learning.	Children and young people will be attending education and training and will be achieving their expected outcomes at the end of their phase of learning
Lead – Virtual school head teacher	Work with employers and employment support services to help young people to find work.	Young people who have lost work through Covid 19 will find employment
4. We want to be physically and emotionally healthy	Provide all children and young people with the individual social, emotional, physical and practical support they need to ensure they are prepared with skills that support good health for life.	All health reviews will have a recorded SDQ and an outline action plan to support improved lifelong health.
Joint Leads – Specialist Nurse, Children in Care	Children and young people will be supported by carers and professionals to take responsibility for their health and understand how to access a variety of physical, emotional and mental health services.	Children and young people will confidently access a variety of health services when a health need arises.

What do care experienced children and young people want?	How will we make this happen?	How will we know it has been successful?
Principal Clinical Psychologist in CAMHS	Improve children and young people's access to health professionals, services and health information that will support emotional, psychological and physical health direct and indirectly.	Develop a mental health pathway for Children in Care and their carers to access CAMHS assessment and psychological support. Increase points of health contact with professionals and evidenced based health information and advice using a variety of media platforms.
	All Care Leavers need to understand their health history so they can understand their health needs and maintain good health throughout their life.	Secure funding for the Care Leavers Health App and ensure all Care Experienced Young People can access their health information when they need it.
5. We want to enjoy a range of play, sport, leisure and cultural opportunities Lead - Director of Resources	Develop links between other service areas of the authority such as Public Health, to join up resources across the council to help support this priority	Increase in opportunities as reported to the Corporate parenting Panel.
	Look to persuade council strategic partners such as HALO leisure, Courtyard Theatre, Hereford FC, Higher and Further education providers to provide direct and indirect support	Reported increase in support from strategic partners.
	Develop a communication strategy to ensure that young people and carers are aware of opportunities that are available within the city, market towns and all communities.	Communication strategy produced and implemented.
	Explore holding annual sporting event, for young people.	Feasibility assessed by March 2021.
6. We want our voice to matter	Support YVM to develop and undertake their priorities, and represent the voice of all CYP.	YVM deliver against priorities and hold the CPP to account.

What do care experienced children and young people want?	How will we make this happen?	How will we know it has been successful?
Lead – Lead Member for Children and Young People (supported by foster carer representative and Participation and Mentoring Officer)	Staff, councillors, communities and businesses involve children and young people in rebuilding our community, economy and environment after lockdown.	Children and young people report that they are listened to, supported and involved.
	We will support positive and constructive involvement with other topical issues including climate change and Black Lives Matter.	
	Consultation and participation of children and young people is embedded within Herefordshire Local Authority as best practice.	Children and young people are attending and participating in their LAC review meeting
	Support and educate our workforce to develop confidence and competence when working with ALL children and young people	Evidenced involvement in training plans and training delivery, further development of peer support service.
7. When leaving care we want to live happy, healthy and financially secure lives Leads – Head of Looked After Children and Director Of Resources	Support our workforce to improve their understanding of children and young people's wishes and feelings.	Evidence that the wishes and feelings of young people are considered, visible and championed in everything we do including commissioning, procurement and policy making.
	We will prepare young people to live independently	Young people succeed in managing their tenancy
	More young people are engaged in education, training or employment	Reduction in NEET at age 19, 20 and 21
	Young people have a choice of accommodation that meets their needs	Increase in suitable accommodation at age 19,20 and 21