

Gwynedd Council Corporate Parenting Strategy

January 2025

1. Foreword

Dear Corporate Parents,

As a young person who has been through the care system, I would like to offer you the following observations as this new strategy begins about your responsibilities toward us as corporate parents.

Remember, first of all, that it is not our choice to go into care; but as we have been forced into the situation, an understanding of the reality of the situation is required. Through this letter you will, hopefully, gain a better understanding.

One thing that persists throughout this message, is for you to realise how important it is that you listen to us. It takes a great deal of courage for us to express and share our feelings. It is a huge step in our lives to share our most personal feelings, and when we do so, you must realise how difficult this is and how important it is that you believe what we say. Our lives can change as a result of sharing our experiences and knowing that someone believes us makes a difference.

We are children, like all other children, and when we are placed in a foster home, we want to be treated like the other children in the home. We want the opportunity to go on holiday with our carers - we don't want to be placed in respite care when everyone else goes away. We want good quality clothes - just like those the children at the foster home get, and want to have the necessary equipment to do our school work. This probably sounds quite obvious to you, but it is important that we are able to say it.

Our families continue to be important to us, even though we are in care, but everyone should not be painted with the same brush. See each of us as an individual. Sometimes, we do not wish to see our blood relatives, and there are a number of reasons for this; but it isn't the situation forever. Situations change, and feelings and wishes change, and it is necessary to be flexible and respond to our wishes. Remember also, when we are not placed with our brothers and sisters that they are still very important to us, and we want to see them regularly in a comfortable place and not in public places. Make sure we have pictures of our childhood - they help us remember our own stories in years to come.

Growing up is difficult, but growing up in care is more difficult. We would like for you to understand that, for a great many of us, 16 years old is far too young to think about living independently. It is necessary to work with carers to ensure they are able to support us and offer us a home until we are ready to leave. Being 16 or 18 years old does not mean we do not need support. Make sure we have a home to return to when we are on leave from university. Having security and stability helps us succeed.

Perhaps, at times, we will need help to concentrate at school and sometimes this will mean we don't want to go; this is because we have so much going on in our lives compared to other children. So, we need you to understand this and help us deal with it. We need you to see things through our eyes and put yourselves in our shoes. In doing so you may understand why we behave the way we do.

To summarise, therefore... the main messages we'd like you to hear as corporate parents are:

- Listen
- Respect
- Treat us as you would your own children
- Be there through everything
- Remember we have a story that's important to us, and help us remember it.

Yours faithfully,
Young person who used to be in care.

2. Message from the Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families

It is my pleasure to present this important strategy that sets out our responsibilities as corporate parents to ensure that we fulfil the priorities and aspirations noted for you as children and young people in our care.

Gwynedd Council takes its responsibilities as corporate parent seriously, and is committed to ensuring that every child and young person in its care, and who has left its care, are given the best opportunities in life.

We acknowledge that you face a number of challenges in your lives. Gwynedd Council works closely across the Council's Departments and with our external partners to ensure that doors open to you in order to offer opportunities which will maximise your ability to reach your potential in the future - exactly as we would do with our own children.

We want to assure you that you will have access to good educational opportunities and we will encourage you to do your best by supporting you to attend school, whilst accepting that there will be times in your lives when this seems difficult. But, our aim is to support you through difficult times by listening and discussing with you and by trying to reach a situation where you feel more confident.

We work very hard to ensure you are placed in suitable and welcoming foster homes so that you are able to feel safe and secure. We will also ensure that you are able to keep in regular touch with your family, in a safe environment. We know that this is important to you.

We are eager to ensure that your social worker spends time getting to know you and that your social worker will not change unless there is good reason for doing so. If you have any concern or complaint about the service you're receiving, we assure you that we will listen to you and will try to solve any problem immediately.

We are eager to ensure that you are clear about the things you should expect from us as corporate parents and, so, I introduce this strategy to you as an operational document that lays the foundation for implementing our priorities and our commitments to you.

Councillor Menna Trenholme
Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families

3. Messages from our Looked-after Children

'My foster parents are great - I can go to them to discuss anything'

'I chose to stay with my foster parents under the 'When I'm Ready' scheme, and this has meant that I am able to undertake a college course. Without the scheme, I think things would be very different for me'

'It is important that the social worker is not changed - we form a relationship and we trust them and change is difficult as you have to start from the beginning once again'

'I want to see more of my family - not just mam and dad, but my brothers and sister and my cousins'

'I don't attend my statutory review as they are too formal and there are too many people there discussing my situation'

'I get the opportunity to pursue my interests outside school - I'm very busy!'

'I enjoy school, but I've had to change schools a number of times because of my situation, and that is very difficult. I now know that I am staying in ****, and I'm happy at the school and have made friends.'

'We don't want to be punished with an absence mark if we leave school to attend our reviews'.

4. Commitments and Responsibilities

This strategy sets out Gwynedd Council's vision and commitment for looked-after children and young people and explains how we as a Council will succeed as effective corporate parents, whatever their age, language, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, belief or disability.

As every good parent knows, children need a safe environment to grow and thrive. Parents protect and support their children against life's dangers and risks. Parents have ambitions for their children and want them to reach their potential. Parents celebrate their children's achievements. The child that is looked after by the Council has the right to expect the same from his/her corporate parents as he/she would from a good parent. Every child and young person needs to live in a safe and stable environment in order for them to develop and thrive. As a Council, we are ambitious on their behalf and are eager to celebrate and share their successes.

This means that we as a Council:

- *We will support care-experienced children and young people to have the same life chances as every other young person in Wales. This is because all children have rights, no matter who they are.*
- *We will recognise care-experienced children and young people for who they are, not just by their experience of being in care. This is because all children have a right not to be discriminated against.*
- *We will work alongside care-experienced children and young people to ensure their views, feelings and ideas are integral to, influence and inform the services they receive and the way they receive those services. This is because all children have a right to be listened to and taken seriously.*
- *We will ensure professionals working with care-experienced young people understand their care experiences children and young people's needs and/or have access to information and training.*
- *We will ensure every care-experienced child and young person reaches their potential and can enjoy a wide experience of leisure, cultural, sport and social activities. This is because all children have a right to be the best they can be (Article 3 and 29) and have the right to relax and play.*
- *We will make all care-experienced children and young people feel valued, respected, cared for and loved. This is because all children have a right to be safe and protected from harm and because all children who are not living with their families should be checked on regularly to make sure they are okay.*
- *We will provide support to access the right health care and advice needed to support the best physical, mental health and general well-being for all care-experienced children and young people. This is because all children have the right to the best possible health and support.*
- *We will seek out and provide stable places to live that are right for all care-experienced children and young people. This is because all children have a right to special protection if they don't live with their family. This is because any adoption must be overseen by Government to make it supports the young person in their growth and development, is lawful and that it prioritises children's best interests.*
- *We will provide opportunities and support for all care-experienced children and young people to learn/develop and help them become who they want to be. This is because all children have a right to an education.*

- *We will ensure all care-experienced children and young people are prepared for the future and are able make positive choices for independent living and adulthood. This is because all children have a right to reach their potential.*
- *We will work to provide access to and raise awareness of the support and information available after leaving care. This is because adults have a duty to act in children's best interests.*

And most importantly...

As a Corporate Parent we will ensure that we think, plan, act and make decisions in line with the following assumption:

"If this were my child..."

We take joint responsibility with every elected member, every Council department, along with our partners, in our effort to continue to improve results for children and young people.

The Corporate Parent Panel will work to ensure that the above is addressed. In accordance with the Welsh Government's Corporate Parenting Charter we will fulfil the following promises when working with children and young people who are are experienced.

- *We will take time to listen to all care-experienced children and young people and ensure their views, wishes and feelings are heard and actively considered in all decisions made about them.*
- *We will treat all care-experienced children and young people with respect.*
- *We will involve all experienced children and young people in decisions that are made about them. We will keep all care experienced children and young people informed about our involvement with them and explain our actions to them.*
- *We will use straightforward language when we communicate with all care-experienced children and young people.*
- *We will show compassion when considering the needs of all care-experienced children and young people.*
- *We will work with all care-experienced children and young people to help them achieve their goals.*
- *We will advise all care-experienced children and young people of the process to make a complaint should they feel we are not adhering to this charter.*
- *We will advise all care-experienced children and young people that they have a right to access independent advocacy to make sure their views, wishes and feelings are heard during decisions being made or when they are unhappy and want something stopped, started or changed.*

5. Key Responsibilities

The corporate parent responsibility has been set out for local authorities in the Children Act 1989 and 2005. In addition, Section 27 of the Children Act 1989 places a duty on the Health Authority as well as Housing and Education Departments within Local Authorities to assist

Social Services Departments to carry-out their duties under the Act in the context of providing assistance, support and services for looked-after children and young people. The Departments that include leisure services, libraries and youth services have a role to play in supporting looked-after children and those who have left care by providing opportunities to learn, participate and promote their health and well-being.

Gwynedd Council, through the Lead Cabinet Member, the Chief Executive, the Social Services Statutory Director and the Head of Children and Supporting Families have a key role in ensuring the Council carries out its responsibility as corporate parent in full in a way that builds trust and confidence among the children and young people in their care.

The "If this were my child..." document clearly states that the Council in its entirety is the 'corporate parent' and states that every councillor has a fundamental duty over the children in his/her care. In order to implement the responsibility, clear procedures need to be in place in order to provide them with accurate information to enable them to understand the fundamental issues facing looked-after children and young people in their areas. It is not appropriate to provide personal information about individual cases, but general information about specific fields and local trends that affect looked-after children must be provided, along with information about the quality and range of services available for them.

In Gwynedd Council, the Corporate Parent Panel, on behalf of the Council as a whole, will implement the direct responsibility to ensure that appropriate and suitable services are available for looked-after children. The Corporate Parent Panel will be responsible for taking action by setting up task and finish groups that will focus on specific fields in order to look closely at the quality of services, successes and obstacles as well as finding out about experiences directly from children, young people and carers, in order to improve the experiences of looked-after children in Gwynedd.

Each councillor will be given annual training to raise awareness of their responsibilities as corporate parents, and a report relaying the activities of the Corporate Parent Panel will be submitted to a meeting of the full Council annually.

The Panel will meet every quarter, and will arrange meetings to focus on one particular priority field in order to ensure that due attention is given to aspects of the service, with the assumption that panel members take responsibility to lead on the work with key officers and partners. It is expected that practical research be carried out between meetings and the panel member is responsible for reporting on any findings to be discussed at the panel.

Gwynedd Council is proud of its ability to provide foster care of the highest standard and it invests heavily in recruiting, assessing and registering local foster carers for children in Gwynedd. Foster care of the highest quality is a resource that is vital in enabling us to ensure that our commitments to looked-after children are carried out.

Foster carers are responsible for looking after the children in their care as though they were their own children, and for ensuring they have the best opportunities, advocate on their behalf and collaborate well with parents, social workers and partners. A high percentage of children looked-after by the Council are placed with their own family members who become registered foster carers because of the children's legal status. We fully commit to taking responsibility for providing the same practical and professional support for these families as

for any other foster placement, since the challenge of looking after a child from one's own family is one that is fully acknowledged.

We have ensured that the opinion and voice of the foster parent is included in Corporate Parent Panel activity through having an experienced foster carer as a panel member.

Leadership and Governance Structures

Membership of the Corporate Parent Panel:

Council Officers

Chief Executive

Statutory Director of Social Services

Head of Children and Supporting Families

Head of Education

Head of Economy and Community Department

Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department

Senior Manager – Children's Services

Senior Education Manager

Senior Manager, Housing and Well-being

Independent Reviewing Officer

Council Members

Cabinet Member - Children and Supporting Families

Cabinet Member - Adults, Health and Well-being

Cabinet Member - Housing

Cabinet Member - Education

Cabinet Member – Economy and Community

Partners

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board - Children's Services Manager

Looked-after Children

Looked-after Children Champion

Looked-after Children Representative

Foster Parent Representative

The Panel will invite relevant officers from different agencies and from within the Council depending on the focus area of specific discussions.

Our Vision

Gwynedd Council's vision for looked-after children places specific responsibilities on each member of the Corporate Parent Panel, namely:

- Putting the child or young person at the centre of everything we do.
- Listen to looked-after children and young people

- Re-establish and hold a contributor group to listen to and collaborate with looked-after children in order to improve services and support
- Ensure that the promises made to looked-after children and young people are kept
- Act to remove any obstacles to service provision or individual opportunities.
- Understand the impact all the Council's decisions have on looked-after children and young people
- Ensure that governance arrangements are in place to implement decisions about children and young people across the authority and other agencies
- Gain access to quantitative and qualitative information about the services and ensure sufficient individual understanding to evaluate the information and its meaning for looked-after children
- Conduct a detailed analysis of the needs of the looked-after population and all aspects of services required to respond to the need so that clear evidence is available to feed into decisions for the future.

6. Looked-after Children in Gwynedd

Gwynedd Council aims to support most of the children and young people in the county by enabling and supporting them to live with their families in their communities without statutory intervention and without bringing them into care. Nevertheless, for a small number, this is not possible and they need short term or long term care under statutory care arrangements.

The experiences of being in care vary for every child according to what they experienced as care from the family. The feeling of loss is commonplace and needs to be acknowledged - the loss of relationship with family members, despite the bad experiences they have had whilst in their parents' care, and particularly the loss if they have to move from the area, and lose school friends. Children and young people become looked-after either through a court order or through agreement with the parents. There can be several reasons why some children become looked-after by the Council - either as a result of temporary problems their parents are facing, or as a result of more permanent issues which means that it is no longer safe to send some children home.

The children and young people we look after come from all kinds of life backgrounds and have different aspirations, aims and cultural backgrounds.

The "corporate parenting" term is used to describe the joint responsibility the Council and its partners have to ensure effective, stable, safe and appropriate care for looked-after children and young people, including those who are leaving care.

We are aware that looked-after children are at a greater risk of being socially isolated compared to their peers who are not in care, because of their experiences before becoming looked-after and because they are looked-after. It is, therefore, critical that the Council, as Corporate Parent, ensures that the experience of being looked after is a positive and supportive one that maximises their potential and ensures they play a full part in their community.

When it is not possible to place children in foster care because of complex needs, we are committed to finding alternative placements that respond to the needs of the individual and work tirelessly to ensure that there is no delay in planning the care for the specific child or young person.

We have ensured that the opinion and voice of the child who has been looked-after in Gwynedd is included in the activities of the Corporate Parent Panel through the membership of a young person on the panel.

There has been an increase in the number of children placed at home with their parents under Care Orders. By their nature, it is acknowledged that these are high risk placements in some circumstances. Gwynedd Council is committed to ensuring that safeguarding these children and young people is a corporate priority. The Council is committed to promoting and ensuring the success of these placements as they mean that the children and young people are brought up with their own parents, within their own families, and in their own communities, whilst acknowledging that this cohort of looked-after children needs a great deal of support through providing specialist services to adults, children and young people.

7. Including looked-after children and young people

A vital aspect of our vision as Corporate Parents is our commitment to listening to the children and young people we look after. Historically, we have held 'Have your Say' sessions with representation from looked-after children and young people in order to give them the opportunity to meet and discuss specific issues that are important to them with officers and representatives of elected members who are members of the Corporate Parent Panel.

It is our priority to re-establish similar arrangement in the near future and we are currently putting plans in place to make this happen.

We are making sure we get the opinion of looked-after children and young people in every review of foster parent registrations through asking their opinion about placements and any specific matter that will improve their experiences.

We are ensuring that older young people who remain in our care or who have left care gain access to regional and national groups held by 'Voices from Care', and through this be in a situation to influence service planning and future policies.

We operate within the National Advocacy Framework to ensure that looked-after children and young people have access to independent advocacy services when any issue surrounding their care concerns them to such a degree they feel they need independent help from an advocate to resolve it.

We want to ensure that the opinions of children and young people are given full consideration in their statutory reviews throughout their time in care.

Social workers and foster carers are vitally important in ensuring the voice of the child and young person is heard, that they have the opportunity to voice their wishes and aspirations and their opinion about the care they receive.

8. Corporate Parent in Gwynedd

Gwynedd Council's vision for looked-after children and young people is based on the opinion of children and young people in Gwynedd.

- Health and Well-being
- Enjoyment and Attainment (Education)
- To be safe
- Make a positive contribution
- Economic well-being and becoming an adult

An important part of the Council's role as an effective corporate parent is to ensure we develop a sense of being careful of these children and young people and that we want the best for them in life, not simply ensuring they receive adequate care by checking operational arrangements.

Despite the attention given to the field over the years, the results gap between looked-after children and other children has further widened. We as a Council intend to improve life opportunities for looked-after children and young people and reduce the current gap.

Corporate parents have a responsibility to protect and promote the well-being of the children they look after and prepare them for adult life by:

- Listening to looked-after children and responding to them by being clear and honest
- Identifying the complexity that stems from caring for looked-after children, and ensuring that appropriate interventions are found to support carers as well as children and young people
- Creating the right circumstances to identify the needs of individual children, and ensuring that services respond to these needs
- Questioning and, if necessary, challenging aspects of services and quality of services that are provided for looked-after children and young people
- Ensuring that looked-after children receive suitable education and achieve, at least, in accordance with their ability.
- Ensuring that the authority's strategic plans and the joint plans with other key partners reflect the needs of looked-after children and young people
- Ensuring that we have up-to-date information about the field and best practice that can be fed in to future decisions.

Health and Well-being



Gwynedd Council endeavours to ensure that you as looked-after children and young people have the best possible opportunities in life through enjoying good health. The Council and its partners will develop holistic arrangements to ensure you have access to physical and emotional health services and care and health education, in a timely and responsive manner.

Education



Good education is critical for a bright future and to maximise opportunities. As corporate parents, we have a responsibility to ensure we encourage and support you to reach your highest possible educational attainment, and to support you to do your best. This is vital in preparing you to succeed when faced with life's challenges as an adult.

Staying Safe



The Council will promote and safeguard your welfare by providing high quality specialist services that will concentrate on your individual needs. We will help you keep in touch with your family and other people who are important to you. We will ensure you have one social worker who will form a relationship with you and will be available to you if you have any problem or concern. We are committed to finding a home for you that suits you and that creates an environment for you where your needs are given priority.

Make a Positive Contribution



It is acknowledged that people's opinions help the Council provide services that rightly meet their needs. We will encourage you to develop your talents and interests and support you to do the things you enjoy. But, above all else, we promise you that we will include you in the decisions that affect your lives.

Economic well-being and becoming an adult



It is a challenge for us as corporate parents to meet the unique and wide-ranging needs of each of you and ensure you are prepared for life as independent adults. We will work hard with you to give you the help and support you will need to move on from being looked-after to life as an adult, ensuring that you have opportunities in education and employment and can live independently in a stable home.

9. Conclusion and statements

Looked-after children and young people in Gwynedd should expect to receive the type of support responsible parents would give their children and, therefore, the Council along with its main partners must work together and take ownership of their responsibilities in providing this support. The Corporate Parent Panel works on behalf of the Council to address this. The Panel will take a strategic and operational overview to ensure the life opportunities for looked-after children and children who are leaving care are maximised so that they reach their full potential and, even more importantly, that they develop into hard-working and well-rounded citizens, adults and parents. The Panel will endeavour to ensure that children and young people, including those who have left care, have access to the Council's services and the services of relevant partners.