

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Council	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	21st May 2015	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	Pledge to Children in Care	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1 – A copy of the Pledge. Alternatively on http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sitedocuments/Children-and-Young-People/ChildreninCare/pledge_online_b-active.pdf		

1 THE ISSUE

Following the publication of 'Care Matters: Time for Change' in June 2007, there has been a requirement for all Local Authorities to develop and publish a Pledge to their Looked after Children and Care Leavers. The Pledge sets out the services and support children should expect to receive.

Since the implementation of our Pledge in 2008 Bath & North East Somerset's Pledge to Children in Care has continued to be updated to reflect current regulations, guidance and best practice. The new Council following local elections is invited to affirm its commitment to the Pledge.

2 RECOMMENDATION

Council is asked to approve the Bath and North East Somerset Council Pledge to Children and Young People in Care.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

There are no direct financial implications arising from re-approving the Pledge. The Pledge sets out standards for corporate parenting which can be met within existing capacity and resources.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The Pledge is a requirement from 'Care Matters', the aim of which was to establish and promote best practice for Children in Care. The Pledge enables the participation of Children in Care about matters which affect them (article 12 UN Convention of the rights of the child). The Pledge provides a way to improve the life chances of disadvantaged teenagers and young people.

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 The Local Authority has statutory duties under the Children Act 1989 to identify children in need including those in need of protection from abuse or neglect, and to provide services to promote and safeguard their welfare. These include duties to look after those children who need to come into public care, towards whom the Council has duties effectively to act as a 'corporate parent'. These duties are established in the Children Act 1989 as amended by subsequent legislation, and requirements for their implementation are detailed in Regulations and Guidance.
- 5.2 Children come into care for a variety of reasons. These include abuse or neglect, absent parenting, family breakdown or homelessness at age 16 or 17. Children may be in care by order of a court (particularly in cases of abuse or neglect); or by agreement with parents; or at the request of young people (aged 16-17) who are homeless. Children may also be remanded into care when facing criminal charges.
- 5.3 Elected Members are ultimately accountable for the quality of corporate parenting provided to these children – the Council collectively acts as corporate parent. The overall duty of the Council, and therefore all elected Members, as corporate parent is to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in care. As a corporate parent we should all ask the question 'would this be good enough for my child?' The Pledge to Children in Care provides a means to address this question in more detail as it covers key aspects of corporate parenting. The Pledge also sits alongside other initiatives and ambitions we have developed (The Virtual School, The Looked After health team, Independence training) to try and close the gap between the outcomes for children in care and those who have never been in care.
- 5.4 Corporate parenting – just like parenting in a family – does not stop when a child becomes an adult at 18. We have a duty to support young people moving on from care – often known as 'care leavers' – until they are 21 at least, and until they are 25 if they continue in or return to further or higher education. The Pledge therefore contains standards for our continuing support to care leavers. Recent legislation promotes the opportunity of 'Staying Put' for those wishing to remain with their carers beyond age 18, and this scheme is established in Bath & North East Somerset.
- 5.5 In 2008 the Council adopted a Pledge to Children in Care at a meeting of full Council. The Pledge sets out 10 promises covering standards of service children

in care are entitled to. These standards are drawn from the legal framework within which the Council acts as a corporate parent and set local standards for best practice in this context. The selection of standards for inclusion in the Pledge was based on what young people told us locally was most important to them.

- 5.6 The Pledge sets a benchmark against which young people, elected Members, staff, carers and partners can judge whether corporate parenting in Bath and North East Somerset is delivering the ambitions for our children in care and care leavers. An In Care Council has been established to monitor whether these standards are met from a young people's perspective. This is a group of young people in care supported by local charity 'Off The Record' and commissioned by the Council to support young people's participation in service improvement. Members of the In Care Council will sometimes attend meetings of the Corporate Parenting Members Group to ensure elected Members are able to hear young people's views on their experience of being in care.
- 5.7 Over the course of the coming year the In Care Councils will be invited to refresh the Pledge by surveying children in care on how it is being delivered and consider if the current priorities are the right ones.
- 5.8 The Corporate Parenting Members Group meets quarterly and all elected Members are welcome to attend. The next meeting is scheduled for June and will include an informative induction for Members.

6 RATIONALE

- 6.1 There is a requirement for Children's Services to publish a Pledge to children in their care. This informs children of what they can expect, and contains promises that can be measured and judged. Our Pledge aligns us to good practice nationally and the OFSTED inspection of Children's Services will consider how the pledge is being delivered.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 Due to the requirement for a Pledge to be published, no other options have been considered.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 *Cabinet Member; Staff; Service Users; Section 151 Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer*
- 8.2 The Council's original Pledge was drawn up in 2008 in consultation with young people, staff and the Cabinet Member for Children's Service. An updated version was presented in 2011 following discussion with the Corporate Parenting Members Group and In Care Council. The updated Pledge was shared with the Section 151 Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer.
- 8.3 The content in the Pledge attached to this report is unchanged since 2011 so wider consultation has not taken place. At this time the purpose is to invite Members to renew their commitment to The Pledge.

9 RISK ASSESSMENT

A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

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Background papers	<i>'The Care Matters: Time for Change' publication can be seen at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-matters-time-for-change</i>
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	