

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Council
MEETING DATE:	19 th May 2011
TITLE:	Pledge to Children in Care
WARD:	ALL
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM	
List of attachments to this report: Bath and North East Somerset Council's Pledge to Children and Young People in and Moving On from Care	

1 THE ISSUE

1.1 The Council's Pledge to Children in Care has been updated to reflect new regulations and guidance which came into force on April 1st 2011. The new Council following local elections is invited to affirm its commitment to the updated pledge.

2 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 Council is asked to approve the updated Bath and North East Somerset Council Pledge to Children and Young People in and Moving On from Care.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

4 CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- *Improving 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. The Regulations and Guidance have been updated this year to reflect changes introduced by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

- 5.2 Children come into care for a variety of reasons. These include abuse or neglect, family breakdown or homelessness aged 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. Occasionally children may 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 all key aspects of corporate parenting.

- 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. These standards have been updated in the light of new Regulations and Guidance which came into force on 1st April 2011.

- 5.5 In 2008 the Council adopted a Pledge to Children in Care at a meeting of full Council. This Pledge sets out 10 promises covering basic 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 'good enough' 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 and moving on from care supported by Off The Record and The Childrens Society who have been commissioned by the Council to support young people's participation in service improvement. Members of the In Care Council regularly attend meetings of the Corporate Parenting Members Group to ensure elected Members are able to hear young people's views on whether we are keeping our Pledge.

- 5.7 An induction leaflet on corporate parenting has been drawn up for new and existing elected Members which gives more information about corporate parenting in Bath and North East Somerset. The leaflet sets out the support available to elected Members in their corporate parenting role including induction sessions planned for June 2011 and the quarterly Corporate Parenting Members Group which all elected Members are welcome to attend.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

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

7 EQUALITIES

- 7.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment was carried out on corporate parenting in Bath and North East Somerset in 2009. This was done in the course of implementing the Care Matters programme to improve corporate parenting. The Pledge to Children in Care was also introduced as an early step in this programme. The equalities issues in relation to corporate parenting have not significantly changed since this assessment.

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. The updated Pledge has been drawn up in discussion with the Corporate Parenting Members Group and In Care Council. This report and updated Pledge have been shared with the Section 151 Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer for comment.

9 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

- 9.1 *Social Inclusion; Customer Focus; Young People; Human Rights*

10 ADVICE SOUGHT

- 10.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

Contact person	<i>Charlie Moat, Care and Young People Service Manager</i> <i>01225 477914, charlie_moat@bathnes.gov.uk</i>
Background papers	
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	