

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Full Council	
MEETING DATE:	25th May 2023	
TITLE:	Pledge to Children in Care	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		

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 pledge is co-produced with children and young people in care and care experienced young adults.

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 and Care Leavers.

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 and Care Leavers. 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 looked after 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 and 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, homelessness at age 16 or 17 and or as unaccompanied asylum seeker children (UASC). 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, The Local Offer) 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 experienced young adults – until they are 25 years. The Pledge therefore contains standards for our continuing support to care leavers. Alongside this, legislation promotes the opportunity of 'Staying Put' for those wishing to remain with their carers beyond age 18, and this scheme is well established and successful in Bath & North East Somerset.

5.5 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 are members 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 The pledge has recently been updated. The In Care Councils reviewed the Pledge in Jan 2023 and provided feedback and suggestions for update- all of which are reflected in the revised Pledge. The Pledge has also been reviewed in line with existing and new Legislation (i.e., Extended Duties, 2018) and consultation undertaken with Members and Staff. The Pledge will continue to be reviewed over the forthcoming term, by both the In Care Councils and the Corporate Parenting Group Members, in order to evaluate its effectiveness and implementation. All cabinet members are encouraged to submit comments via the Corporate Parenting Group
- 5.8 The Corporate Parenting Group meets quarterly and all elected Members are welcome to attend. The next meeting is scheduled for 6th June 2023.
- 5.9 It is important to remember that effective Corporate Parents consider their role for children and young people within B&NES, not just within the Corporate Parenting Group Meeting, but in their everyday role as a councillor. The Pledge assists Members in carrying out this very important role.

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; Members; Staff; Service Users; Partner Agencies*

- 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, 2015 and 2018/2015 following discussion with the Corporate Parenting Members Group and In Care Council. Updates are co-produced with children and young as a matter of principle in B&NES. The Pledge is currently on the Early App and is available on the website ..

9 RISK ASSESSMENT

9.1 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	<p><i>'The Care Matters: Time for Change' publication can be seen at</i> https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-matters-time-for-change</p> <p><i>'Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After <u>Children</u>'</i> https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children--2</p> <p><i>Promoting the Education of Looked After Children and Preciously Looked After Children</i> https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf</p> <p><i>Extending Personal Advisor Support to all Care Leavers to age 25</i> https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683701/Extending_Personal_Adviser_support_to_all_care_leavers_to_age_25.pdf</p>
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