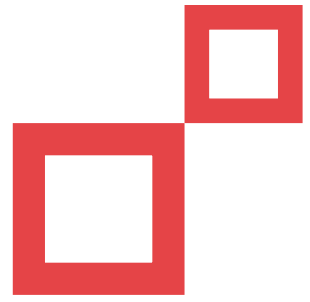


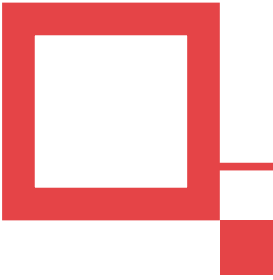
If this were my child...



A councillor's
guide to being
a good
corporate
parent



October 2003



Foreword

by Margaret Hodge Minister
for Children, Young People
and Families

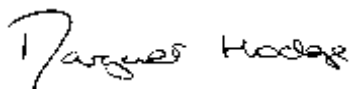
In September 1998 Frank Dobson, the then Secretary of State for Health, wrote to all councillors to launch Quality Protects, a five-year programme to transform children's services. Underlining your vital role in driving forward the initiative, his powerful message was for us to ask ourselves "Is this good enough for my child?"

Five years on, the Local Government Information Unit came to us with the idea for a booklet to help you play an active role in continuing the improvements that Quality Protects has begun. I am delighted to have been involved in the development of this booklet for all councillors and the longer version which is being sent to councillors with specific roles and responsibilities for children's services (details of how to obtain copies of the fuller version are given at the end of this booklet).

Quality Protects aims to improve the life chances of looked after children – a key part of the Government's wider strategy to tackle social

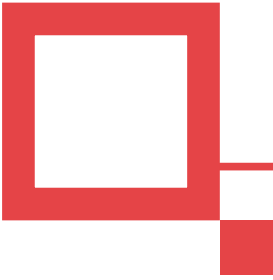
exclusion. This work continues apace, with the launch of the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* and the Social Exclusion Unit's report *A Better Education for Children in Care*; Choice Protects aiming to improve placement quality and choice for children and the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

My appointment as the first Minister for Children, Young People and Families clearly signals the Government's continued commitment to improving the lives of vulnerable children. There are whole areas of the lives of looked after children where they deserve, and we need to do, better. I want to do what I can to give looked after children a better start. I hope you use this summary guide to help you play your part.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Hodge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M'.

MARGARET HODGE MBE

Minister for Children, Young People and Families



1. What is corporate parenting?

Every year local councils look after some 93,000 children who need to leave their homes because of family pressures and problems, abuse or neglect. Who in the council is responsible for these children?

The answer is: you!

Looked after children are not the sole responsibility of social services. The council as a whole is the corporate parent, and councillors have a key role in that.

For these vulnerable children to thrive, the entire council – members and officers – must play their part. 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.

There are several reasons why the council needs to act together:

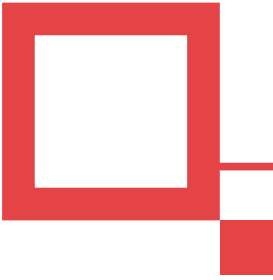
- It is very important for children who have been separated from their families to know that ‘someone out there cares’
- A key lesson from the Quality Protects programme is that children and young people need ‘joined up’ services that work seamlessly together to protect, support and encourage them
- It has the backing of the law – the Children Act 1989 says health, housing and education should help social services look after children in care: in effect that they are a key part of the corporate parenting role.

Key terms

Looked after children – children in the care of the council through a care order made by a court or voluntary agreement with their parent(s). They may be looked after in a children’s home, by foster carers, or other family members. These are the children with whom this guide is primarily concerned.

Children in need – a wider group of children who need the help of services to achieve a reasonable standard of health or development. This group includes disabled children, looked after children and children on the child protection register (see below).

Children at risk of harm – these are children about whom there are concerns that they are or may be at risk of suffering harm through abuse or neglect. Your council will maintain a child protection register of the names of children who are the subject of a child protection plan because of continuing concerns about their safety. It will closely monitor their safety and developmental progress.



2. How can I help?

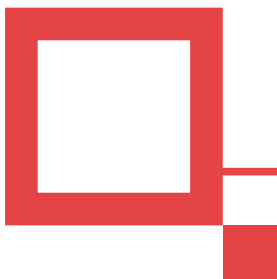
You don't have to be a social services expert to help looked after children. You **do** need to make it your business to find out who and where these children are and to make sure your council is doing its very best to help them.

If this were your child... you would want to know they were well looked after, making progress at school, getting good health care and being given the chance to pursue hobbies and interests.

If this were your child... as they grew older, you would want to know that they were being encouraged to become independent, with support if they needed it, that they were well linked in to the community and that opportunities for further education, training and jobs were opening up to them.

Your council work may not normally bring you into contact with children in care. So how can you go about doing this?

As a corporate parent, you have a right and a duty to question your authority. Your council's scrutiny and executive functions and processes also offer you avenues through which to act.



3. Key questions

You need to ask your council the key questions about children in care that will tell you whether they are safe, well looked after and supported. Use the checklist below to help you in this task.

Checklist

Do you know about the children in your area?

How many children in need, children on the child protection register, looked after children and care leavers are there? How many are from ethnic minorities and how many are disabled? How old are they and what sort of help do they need?

Are they safe?

How is your council fulfilling its duty to safeguard children from abuse or neglect? Is it fully implementing the guidance in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*?

How well does your council look after these children?

Are you supporting families to care for their own children? Or to carry out their continuing responsibilities as parents when children come into care? Can your council provide children coming into care with a choice of stable placements which will meet their particular needs? Are these placements local?

Are they well supported by council and other services?

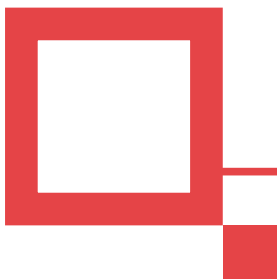
Are they all in school or do they have alternative educational provision? How well are they doing at school, college or university and what needs to be done to improve their achievements? What are their health needs? How are they being helped to stay out of trouble?

What support is there when they leave care?

How does your council support them to independence? What are their housing needs? Is there enough affordable accommodation?

Is your council putting in enough resources?

Are there enough staff, with the right qualifications and experience? Are you supporting foster carers and children's homes to do their important job? Are you paying reasonable allowances to your foster carers? Do staff work with partner organisations, such as Health, Sure Start and Connexions to meet all the needs of looked after children?



The legal and policy framework

Key programmes and legislation governing children's services, with links to find out more:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the overarching framework

<http://www.hri.org/docs/CRC89>

The Children Act 1989 gives local authorities legal responsibility for children in care. Councillors take on the duty of corporate parents to looked after children.

http://www.legislation.hms0.gov.uk/acts/acts1989/Ukpga_19890041_en_1.htm

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 requires local authorities to draw up a Pathway Plan to support young people to independence.

<http://www.legislation.hms0.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000035.htm>

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 overhauled adoption law to ensure the welfare of the child is paramount and that councils provide support for adoptive parents.

<http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/20020038.htm>

Guidance on Promoting the Health of Looked After Children places a duty on local authorities, Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities to ensure every child in care has a health plan that is regularly reviewed.

<http://www.doh.gov.uk/lookedafterchildren/promotinghealth.htm>

Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care requires a nominated champion for looked after children to promote inter-agency working; Personal Education Plans; a designated teacher in each school and an expected limit of 20 school days to provide suitable education for looked after children who change care placement.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/educationprotects>

Quality Protects (England) aims to improve the quality of children's services, backed by a special grant of £885 million over five years (1998–2004). From the outset, Quality Protects emphasised the vital role of councillors as corporate parents.

<http://www.doh.gov.uk/qualityprotects/>

Choice Protects aims to improve the quality and choice of placements for children, backed by a £113 million grant over three years (2003–2006).

<http://www.doh.gov.uk/choiceprotects/index.htm>

Education Protects is driving educational improvements for looked after children, supporting the implementation of the Guidance and the Social Exclusion Unit's report recommendations.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/educationprotects>

Children First (Wales) was launched in 1999 as a parallel programme Quality Protects.

<http://www.childrenfirst.wales.gov.uk/content/about.htm>

The Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' sets out plans to reform children's services in response to The Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report. It establishes a clear framework of accountability with services for children and young people integrated under new Directors of Children's Services.

It proposes:

- Integrated teams of health and education professionals, social workers and Connexions advisers based in schools and Children's Centres
- Sweeping away barriers to information sharing to create effective communication between all those with a responsibility for children
- A Children's Director in every local authority, responsible for bringing all children's services together as Children's Trusts
<http://www.doh.gov.uk/childrenstrusts>
- New duties on police, health and others to safeguard children
- An independent Children's Commissioner to champion children's views
- A lead Council member for children.

Keeping Children Safe: The Government's response to The Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report and joint Chief Inspectors' Report Safeguarding Children

A better education for children in care Social Exclusion Unit Report (2003)
<http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk>

To find out more

You can get the full councillor's guide to corporate parenting by telephoning DfES Publications on 0845 6022260.

Copies of this publication can be obtained from:

DfES Publications
PO Box 5050
Sherwood Park
Annesley
Nottingham NG15 0DJ
Tel: 0845 6022260
Fax: 0845 6033360
email: dfes@prolog.uk.com

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