

The Pledge

Template

For Use in Developing Your Local Authority
Care Matters Pledge as Corporate Parents



National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum

NLCBF is a national network of 44 local authorities from England and five Health and Social Services Trusts from Northern Ireland who work together to improve the quality of their services through benchmarking and shared learning. Our aim is to improve outcomes for young people in care as they make their transition to independence. The Forum is facilitated by the National Care Advisory Service (formerly NLCAS). Membership of NLCBF is open to any UK leaving care service provider. The Forum meets for two days, four times a year and works to benchmark services against national standards and assessment criteria within the framework of the five ECM outcomes as well as discussing current issues, policy issues, identifying good practice examples and useful tools. The Forum also informs policy development at national level. More recently the Forum has been a key partner in the What Makes the Difference? Project (WMTD) – an EU funded project working to identify ways to improve outcomes – as a way to bring additional added-value to members’ involvement

National Care Advisory Service

The National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) is the national advice, support and development service for children in and from care (age 13-25) and those who work with them. We work at local, regional, national and European levels to develop solutions based on good corporate parenting that include and empower young people, professionals and policy-makers to continually improve service quality and outcomes. Our aims are:

- To promote improvement in outcomes for older children in care and care leavers by supporting work at a national, regional and local levels.
- To support the specific implementation of the Care Matters agenda across the country.
- To support local authorities to empower young people to be fully involved in the design, development and delivery of successful services.

Foreword

John Hill (*National Projects Manager, NCAS*)

This joint piece of work reflects the commitment of the National Care Advisory Service and the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum to high quality support, services and parenting to Care Leavers. The Care Matters agenda demands a Pledge from each local authority that sets out the service and support young people should expect from their Corporate Parents. In producing this document, we are aiming to ensure that the specific needs of Care Leavers and older children in care in local authority Pledges are not overlooked. This template draws on the National Leaving Care Standards and is a guide to local authorities to assist them in the process of developing their Pledge. Our two organisations are working in partnership to ensure that local authorities are able to deliver the best possible parenting to their care leavers as they move into independence and adulthood.

Andy Carter (*Chair, Benchmarking Forum Steering Group*)

I am pleased to introduce this joint piece of work from the Benchmarking Forum and the National Care Advisory Service. It is part of our ongoing work in improving services to and outcomes for young people leaving care. We expect it to greatly assist those local authorities who are working hard to make their pledges meaningful and young people focused. I am happy to commend it to you on behalf of the Benchmarking Forum.

Introduction

The Pledge was introduced as a proposal in the Government's Green Paper Care Matters in October 2006. The proposal was widely consulted on with children and young people and also appears in the White Paper Care Matters: Time for Change (2007). It was children and young people who described the need for a promise from local authorities to the children and young people they care for. They had clear ideas about what should be included.

During 2007 the What Makes the Difference project worked closely with Warwickshire County Council to develop a process for creating a Pledge with their children in care and care leavers. This work formed Booklet Four of WMTD's Corporate Parenting pack, 'Putting the Care Back into Corporate Parenting'. The work was included as a case study in the Government's Care Matters Implementation Plan and has informed the development of other work on Pledges in other local authorities.

The National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum is a group of close to fifty local authorities who work together to benchmark their services against national standards, share good practice and act as a strong voice for leaving care services in national policy-making. The development of this template for local authorities grew from their concern that authorities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland had very different ideas about what the Pledge should look like and what kind of areas it should seek to cover.

This work is the result of discussion at National Leaving Care Benchmarking meetings and a specific development day that took place in July 2008. Our aim in producing this work is to provide local authorities only with an idea of what their Pledge to care leavers could look like and include. We are not seeking to provide a "one size fits all" Pledge to be adopted by local authorities at a committee meeting, rather we hope to encourage local authorities to examine the work completed with Warwickshire to assist them with their process and keep this document to hand to give them some sense of what the Pledge in its final form in their authority could look like. The two pieces of work should sit in tandem with each other.

A high quality Pledge will emerge from a high quality process that involves all partners in its development, most especially the young people it serves. The process should have young people contribute to the contents of the Pledge, work in partnership with officers and members to agree it and set out the structures for accountability to it. The Pledge document itself should be clear and detailed, setting out the entitlements of care leavers so they can read it and understand the service, support and care they will receive. The Pledge should also be reflected in the young person's pathway plan. We hope that this template provides some guidance for authorities in the latter part of that process.

How the Template Works

The Template is intended as another arm of the work already completed on the Pledge. We have set out this template to link it with the eight National Leaving Care Standards to ensure that the needs of care leavers are included in every local authority's Pledge. The link with the standards is a natural extension of the work of WMTD, the new remit of National Care Advisory Service and The National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum. The standards were developed with the Forum and the group benchmarks against one standard each year. It is also the Benchmarking Forum that has provided the bulk of practice examples under each standard that appear in the practice database at www.leavingcare.org. The standards and the practice database exist to help you enhance the quality of your service.

For this reason the document reflects the standards and asks questions relating to the criteria under each of them. To this end we hope that it achieves two objectives: firstly, to provide some level of guidance as to the possible content of the Pledge and secondly enables each authority to benchmark through the process within its own leaving care service. The questions included here should be a spur to action.

This document is web-based to enable you to download it, work on it with young people, change it around and put it to use in your own context with your own young people. If you would like to share the results of your work on it with us, we would be very happy to hear from you.

On the basis of work carried out with the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum the following represents a **suggestion** of the kinds of issues, areas and detail that could be included in the Pledge, reflecting the standards. This is intended as a guide to those authorities about to embark on the development of the Pledge, not as a definitive suggestion of a completed Pledge. Any authority that is developing its Pledge with its children and young people should be involving and including them and their views in the development of the document. The WMTD consultation on the Care Matters Green Paper (2006-7) provided a lengthy list of young people's views of what should go into the Pledge and this is reproduced in Booklet Four of the WMTD Corporate Parenting Pack, 'Putting the Care Back into Corporate Parenting' (2008) which is available at www.leavingcare.org.

Our main concern in providing you with this resource is to give you an idea of what your Pledge might look like when it is completed. The process of developing your Pledge is all yours, dependent on the work that you complete with the children and young people to whom you are Corporate Parent. The quality of your Pledge will be borne out of your relationship with the children and young people you care for and the kind of care that you provide. That is what your Pledge should reflect.

Our Pledge to Care Leavers

Local Authority: _____

Principles and Policy Statement	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe your core principles relating to Corporate Parenting and/or your commitment to the support and development of this Pledge. • Describe your commitment to the involvement of young people in the development, monitoring and review of this Pledge. • What are the underlying elements of your Corporate Parenting Strategy/Plan and what do they mean to young people? • What are the intended outcomes for young people of this Pledge? • How will staff, officers and members be working towards securing the success of the Pledge?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Link to CP strategy

Accountability and Development	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What structure will be put in place to ensure that the Pledge is meaningful and acted upon? • How will staff, officers and members be accountable for the promises set out in the Pledge? • How will the Pledge be monitored and reviewed? • How will young people be involved in this process? • How will care or pathway planning be affected by the Pledge? • What structure will be put in place to ensure that young people can challenge their care if they feel the Pledge is not being met? • How will the Pledge be consulted on with wider groups of young people, staff and others? • How will the Pledge link to any existing young people's fora or Children in Care Council? • What arrangements for ongoing development will be put in place to address any aspirational statements in the Pledge? 	

Standard One - Corporate Parenting	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do young people have access to a copy of the Corporate Parenting Policy and Strategy in an appropriate format? How can they access it? • How are young people able to be involved in the development of the Policy? Are they able to contribute in any way? • How does the policy set out clearly to young people how their needs will be assessed and met? • How are young people informed about the Pledge, its development and opportunities to participate in it? • How are young people made aware of the roles and responsibilities of the people that care for them and what they can expect from them? • How is feedback and evidence from young people used to improve services? 	

Standard Two - Being Healthy	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the health of young people assessed and supported? • How are young people made aware of the health assessment process and what they can expect in terms of care and support? • How is the confidentiality of young people protected and to what extent? • How will healthy life choices and information on good health be promoted to young people? • How are the issues of emotional and sexual health addressed? What services and support are available to young people? • What external health support services are available to young people? How are young people informed of them? • What services are available for support for serious mental health issues? How will young people be supported through these? • What kind of skilled support in identifying health concerns can young people expect from the staff and carers closest to them? • What kinds of support are available to young parents? • What kinds of support services are in place to support young people with drug and alcohol concerns? • How are young people supported financially to protect their health and wellbeing? • How are fitness, sporting and leisure activities made available to young people? How are young people involved in deciding these? • How is the service to young people around health issues monitored? How are young people involved? 	

Standard Three - Staying Safe	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the policies and procedures in place which provide young people with suitable, safe accommodation. • How are young people informed about the service and support available to them? • To what extent are young people able to be involved in monitoring or reviewing these procedures? • Are young people able to stay in care without pressure until the age of 18? How are young people supported in this decision-making? • What choice and range of accommodation is available to young people? How are they made aware of this? How are they supported in decision-making? • How is the pathway planning process used to assess and review young people's needs prior to a move to supported accommodation? • What kinds of emergency accommodation are available to young people? • What opportunities do young people have to feedback on the quality of their accommodation? • What support is available to help them maintain their accommodation and live safely in it? • What kinds of help and support are available to young people to help them make the transition to independent living? • What forms of independent advocacy are available to young people? • How are young people supported to make safe choices? 	

Standard Four - Enjoy and Achieve	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What written policies do you have regarding young people’s access to education and training? • What written policies do you have relating to young people’s access to leisure? • How do your needs assessment procedures address young people’s access to education, training and leisure? • How are young people’s views on this issue addressed and recorded during needs assessment or pathway planning? • What partnership arrangements are in place to ensure that young people are offered a range of advice, guidance and access to education, training and leisure? • What education and training opportunities if any, are offered to young people who are not in education, employment or training? • What support is available to young people with Special Educational Needs? • What access to education, training, leisure and cultural activities do young people have? • How are young people encouraged and incentivised to pursue further education and other education and training opportunities? • What support is available to young people pursuing specific courses where equipment is needed? • What support, information and guidance is provided to young people who are interested in higher education? 	

Standard Five - Making a Positive Contribution	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What policies are in place relating to young people’s participation and involvement in services? • What workplans or strategies are in place which outline how young people are to be involved? • How are young people involved in the development of policies and plans relating to participation and user involvement? • How are young people involved in the development, delivery, monitoring and reviewing of the local authority Pledge? • How are young people involved in the development and delivery of the leaving care service? • What opportunities are available to young people to learn new skills while being actively involved in the leaving care service? • How are young people involved in the recruitment and induction of staff? • What employment or traineeship opportunities are available to young people? • How are young people involved in the Children in Care Council or other fora? • How do you ensure that opportunities to be involved are accessed by a broad range of young people, including those who are often excluded from these opportunities • How are young people involved in decision-making about their care and pathway planning? • How are young people supported to advocate for themselves? 	

Standard Six - Achieving Economic Wellbeing	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What policies are in place to support young people’s access to employment and training? • What employment or work experience opportunities are available to young people within the local authority? • What support is available to young people to help them access and pursue employment or training opportunities? • How are you young people supported to consider their own future, including supporting themselves financially? • How do young people access information about local employment opportunities? • What support is available to young people to help them understand their skills, abilities and competencies? • What support is available to help young people apply for jobs? • How are young people prioritised for work opportunities within the local authority? • How are young people supported to access employment opportunities with private employers? What agreements with employers are in place to support this? • What emotional, practical and other support is in place to help young people sustain employment? • What financial support is available to young people? • What sort of financial support is available to set up home? • What information is given to young to explain their entitlement to financial support? 	

Standard Seven - Fairness and Diversity	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your Pledge include an opening statement on Equality and Diversity? • What policies on Equality and Diversity do you have? • How are young people made aware of your commitment to equality and diversity and their right to have their needs met? • What efforts are made to ensure that a wide range of staff is recruited to meet the diverse needs and preferences of young people? • How do policies and services meet the needs of lesbian and gay young people? • How do policies meet the needs of black and minority ethnic young people? • How is service and support information provided to young people who do not have English as a first language? • How are the specific needs of young parents addressed in the service? • How are disabled young people supported by the service? What information is available to them? • How are disabled young people meaningfully involved in the service and supported to make decisions about their future? • How are disabled young people supported to make a gradual transition to independence? • How are disabled young people supported with access to education and training? 	

Standard Eight - Preparation and Care Planning	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What policies exist that explain how you help prepare young people for adult life and independence? • How is the planning process used to support young people’s decision making about contact with family? • How is the planning process used to address interests, hobbies, activities outside of employment, education and training? • How is information on the care and pathway planning process provided to young people? • How are young people supported to contribute to their planning process? • How are young people supported to work with their named IRO? 	

Appendix One

Suggestions for Content from Benchmarking Forum meeting July 2008.

Be Healthy

- Encourage you to be sexually healthy and to adopt a healthy lifestyle
- Provide you with access to a range of health services
- Ensure you are registered with a GP and Dentist
- Promote your emotional well-being (including mental health and resilience) and including contact with your family
- Help you to maintain your personal hygiene and look after yourself
- Provide access to the relevant and flexible health services that you need
- Provide information to you that is accessible which relates to healthy living/lifestyles
- Provide access to leisure that promotes your health
- Provide services and support for you if you are a parent
- Provide support and information for you on drug and alcohol misuse

Stay Safe

- Enable you to take reasonable risks in safe and supportive environment
- Provide you with a stable placement
- Make sure you have good knowledge of local authority support services
- Give you a choice when you leave care (informed choice)
- Help you have an awareness of risk and good coping strategies for dealing with it
- Help with being safe in your home
- Provide access to support networks
- Help you manage your tenancy
- Provide you with an independent advocate
- Provide you with the information you need
- Provide you with support and information to keep you safe
- Have contact with you so we know you're safe

Enjoy and Achieve

- Provide you with access to work experience and volunteering opportunities
- Believe in you and what you can achieve – have high aspirations for you
- Provide extra opportunities in and out of school for you when you need it
- Ensure you receive a full and meaningful education
- Always encourage your aspirations
- Provide you with access to cultural and leisure activity, including access to cultural events that are relevant to you
- Provide you with the equipment you need to help you learn
- Provide accommodation for you during holiday times when you are at university
- Provide information on the financial support that you are entitled to help you learn or study

Achieving Economic Well-Being

- Ensure that we provide access to learning and work experience for you
- Work with you to develop your confidence, motivation and self-esteem
- Ensure that the whole local authority recognises its responsibility to you as your Corporate Parent by providing you with a range of opportunities
- Encourage and promote your self-reliance
- Involve you in the development and delivery of our services to you
- Provide you with good quality and stable accommodation
- Provide access to information relating to welfare benefits, budgeting and saving
- Support your transport costs to help you get to work or college
- Provide support to help you stay in work or college if you're finding it difficult

Making a Positive Contribution

- Ensure that we establish, support and work in partnership with the Children in Care Council
- Ensure that you participate fully in your care and pathway planning
- Encourage you to make and maintain positive relationships
- Involve you in the recruitment and selection of foster carers and staff
- Provide opportunities for you to be involved in peer mentoring
- Ensure you have the chance to be involved with community based groups and activities including volunteering
- Support your involvement with other agencies
- Reward your efforts and provide accreditation to mark your successes
- Ensure that we work with you and listen to your views and feelings about your own care
- Support your development as an individual by helping you with Passports, bank accounts, becoming a citizen, national insurance number, birth certificate or immigration status

Equality and Diversity

- Ensure that you understand our commitment to you - All young people receive a service that values diversity, promotes fairness and challenges discrimination
- Ensure you have a choice of a male or female worker
- Make sure that we provide a good service to all young people whatever their needs and have high aspirations for everyone
- Challenging Prejudice wherever we find it
- Ensure that all our staff are properly trained

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