



Scottish Borders Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021 – 2024

Scottish Borders' Promise

FOREWORD

Welcome to Scottish Borders Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan 2021 – 2024

Children and young people who are looked after and care experienced young people are some of the most vulnerable in our society. These children and young people, whose needs we are responsible for, have become looked after for a range of reasons. They have often experienced some form of abuse, neglect and trauma prior to their becoming looked after.

In Scottish Borders, the effective assurance of the wellbeing and protection; listening to and, upholding the rights of looked after children, young people and care leavers is one of our most important responsibilities. We will strive to intervene early to prevent children from becoming looked after. Where children are looked after, we will provide high quality services for each child and young person. In doing so, we strive to reduce the inequalities experienced by them.

Through the publication of the Independent Care Review's 'Promise' in February 2020, looked after and care experienced children and young people have given corporate parents a very clear message and direction to improve services and support to them and their families. The Promise Plan 2021-24 states 'This is immediate and urgent work – what can change now must change now. It also needs broad and deep work that engenders long lasting change, so that there is never a need for another Care Review'. This is both a challenge and mandate for corporate parenting in the Scottish Borders.

The clarity of message and demand for change detailed in the Promise provides a firm, evidential base for the future of corporate parenting in Scotland and, helps shape the focus of development of corporate parenting and improve the lives of looked after and care experienced children and young people across the Scottish Borders.

Successful corporate parenting requires passion, commitment, partnership working and engagement across all agencies. It requires everyone, from the head of organisations to front line practitioners, to take a proactive approach to better understand their corporate parenting responsibilities and improve their practice accordingly. We need to work together to enable looked after children, young people, care leavers and their families to be, and feel, nurtured, listened to and supported to achieve their individual potential.

Corporate parenting is now firmly established across the Scottish Borders as the multi-agency approach to improving services and outcomes for looked after children and care experienced young people. Although corporate parenting across a range of agencies has already brought about significant positive change and outcomes for looked after children, we need to do more at both a strategic and operational level, with a clear interface between the two.

This strategy and action plan sets out our key aspirations for these children and young people and how we intend to achieve them. The Independent Care Review (2020) provides us with a clear direction of travel to help ensure that the care experience and outcomes of our children and young people are as positive as we can make them.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definition of corporate parenting

The Scottish Government's Corporate Parenting Guidance (2015) defines corporate parenting as: An organisation's performance of actions necessary to uphold the rights and safeguard the wellbeing of a looked after child or care leaver, and through which physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development is promoted.

1.2 Duties and responsibilities

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 outlines a range of duties and responsibilities for corporate parents across Scotland. These duties aim to ensure the attention and resources of corporate parents are focused on the task of safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of Scotland's looked after children and care leavers.

Every corporate parent is expected to fulfil these duties in their own way, consistent with their purpose and functions. These duties, outlined in Part 9 (Section 58) of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, include:

1. Being alert to matters which, or which might, adversely affect the wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers;
2. Assessing the needs of those children and young people for services and support they provide;
3. Promoting the interests of those children and young people;
4. Seeking to provide looked after children and care leavers with opportunities to participate in activities designed to promote their wellbeing;
5. Taking action to help looked after children and care leavers:
 - Access opportunities to improve wellbeing and
 - Make use of services, and access the support, which they provide; and
6. Taking any other action to improve the way in which it exercises the Corporate Parenting functions.

These duties are supplemented by a wide range of legislation, regulation and guidance, covering a variety of agencies and disciplines, which provide the framework to support looked after children and young people.

Corporate parenting responsibilities extend to all looked after children from birth to when they cease to be looked after. This includes children in foster care, residential care, secure care, looked after at home on compulsory supervision orders and those in kinship care. It also includes children with a disability who are looked after during periods of short break respite care. A corporate parent's duties also extend to 'care leavers' and can continue until a young person reaches 26 years of age.

1.3 What does it mean to be a corporate parent in Scottish Borders?

Responsible parents fulfil all those activities associated with bringing up children. These include providing for their basic needs, planning for the future, being a resource to turn to, providing positive experiences, hopes and dreams and acting as advocate and mentor. Their legal responsibilities include taking decisions on where children live, what education they receive and when medical treatment is required. As corporate parents we need to listen to our looked after and care experienced children and young people to ensure they have active involvement in all areas of decision making which affects their lives; we need to support the families of our looked after children; we need to know that we are making the same decisions for looked after children as we would make for our own children, so there is no difference between the lives of children in care and their peers. A corporate parent needs to do at least what it would expect a good parent to do.

Scottish Borders corporate parents value all children and young people and recognise the contribution they make to their communities. They are our future and looked after children, like all children and young people, must be given every opportunity to fulfil their potential. Listening to children and young people is always the basis of all decisions made about their lives.

Corporate parents will want the same outcomes for their looked after children as any parent would want for their own children. They will take responsibility for securing the wellbeing of all looked after children. They will recognise the poorer outcomes of looked after children and work together more effectively to remove the inequality which many looked after children experience throughout their care journey and beyond.

We must take a strategic, child and family centred approach to service delivery and shift the emphasis from corporate to parenting, taking all actions necessary to promote and support the health and wellbeing of a child from infancy to adulthood.

The specific intention of the Corporate Parenting Strategy is to widen the ownership of responsibility for looked after children to key partners within the statutory and voluntary sectors to directly improve outcomes for looked after and care experienced children and young people.

1.4 Who are our looked after children in the Scottish Borders?

Scottish Borders is committed to ensuring that, where appropriate children are cared for within a family setting either within their own families or within a foster care setting. We are also committed to placing children and young people, where possible, within their own communities in the Borders. Some children with more complex needs are unable to live within a family and require a residential care setting.

On 1st April 2021 there were 178 looked after children in the Scottish Borders. The breakdown was as follows:

- 35 (19%) were at home with parents
- 58 (33%) were with friends/relatives
- 57 (32%) were with foster carers
- 2 (1%) were with prospective adopters
- 26 (15%) were looked after in residential houses, schools and secure
- 26 young people receive aftercare services
- 29 young people were in Continuing Care

1.5 'The Promise'

Published in February 2020, the Independent Care Review was informed by over 5,500 individual responses, over half of which were from looked after or care experienced children and young people. Driven by an unwavering focus on the voice of care experience, the Independent Care Review's findings, detailed in The Promise demands the following changes:

- The balance of power must be upended so that listening to children and young people is always the basis of all decisions made about their lives.
- There must be a focus on building and maintaining life-long relationships – that includes a broader understanding of the risk of not having long term, loving relationships.
- Scotland must parent, not process, children so there is no difference between the lives of children in care and their peers. Care experienced children must not miss out on the kind of childhood that many take for granted and the future that all our young people deserve.
- Families must be kept together wherever it is safe to do so. Families must get the support that is right for them at the earliest opportunity and it must be flexible, consistent, patient and free from stigma. This will mean that more children can live a safe, happy life at home with their families.

The report has identified five foundations for change, with over 80 specific changes that must be made to transform how Scotland cares for children and families. The five foundations for change detailed in The Promise are:

1. Voice - voice of the children must be heard at all stages;
2. Family - what all families need to thrive;
3. Care - care that builds childhoods for children who Scotland has responsibility
4. People - people with a relentless focus on the importance of relationships, and
5. Scaffolding - scaffolding, so that the structure is there to support children and families when needed.

Scottish Borders corporate parents 'promise' to looked after and care experienced children and young people is that we will develop our services and improve our support in line with the five foundations and changes identified in 'The Promise'.

CURRENT POSITION

2.1 Where are we now?

This version of the Scottish Borders Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024 is the fifth iteration of the strategy. Corporate Parenting is now firmly established across the Scottish Borders as the multi-agency approach to improving services and outcomes for looked after children and care experienced children and young people.

In order to identify the key improvement priorities to be achieved over the next three years, evidence has been drawn from:

- The Independent Care Review's Promise and the Promise Plan 2021-2024
- A self-evaluation and review of the 2018-2021 of corporate parenting and the Scottish Borders Corporate Parenting Action Plan
- Views of the children, young people and care leavers
- Children and Young People Act (Scotland) Act 2014

We have made progress in our support of our looked after children, but we need to improve across a range of our corporate parenting responsibilities.

The Scottish Borders Corporate Parenting Strategy and Ambition provide a framework for the next phase of planning and service development to improve the lifelong outcomes for looked after children and care experienced young people.

2.2 What do we want to achieve?

The Promise clearly identifies Five Foundations for Ambition - change that must be made to transform how Scotland cares for children and families (as well as the unpaid and paid workforce).

As the key policy driver for looked after and care experienced children and young people, the Five Foundations of The Promise and The Promise Plan (published on 31st March 2021) provide a clear strategic direction for the development of corporate parenting in the Scottish Borders.

Using all the evidence from the Scottish Borders corporate parenting self-assessment; the views of looked after and care experienced children and young people; and, taking account of the findings of 'The Promise' and the subsequent Plan, children and young people, corporate parents and stakeholders have identified and prioritised the way forward for our looked after children.

Scottish Borders Corporate Parenting Ambition
(based on The Promise Five Foundations and Plan 21-24)

A good childhood
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support• A right to education• Relationships• Brothers and Sisters• Youth Justice• Advocacy• Moving on• Physical Intervention
Whole family support
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family Support• Peer and Community Support• Service Integration• Family Therapies
Planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family Support• Peer and Community Support• Service Integration
Supporting the workforce
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workforce values• Trauma-informed• Relationships• Workforce support
Building capacity
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legislation• Children’s Hearing System• Inspection and Regulation• Policy Coherence• Data Mapping and Collection• Governance Structures

2.3 What our children and young people want?

As part of the development of the Scottish Borders Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021–2024 Scottish Borders’ Promise, looked after and care experienced young people were consulted on the content of this document. There was unanimous agreement of the statement that:

‘As corporate parents we need to listen to our looked after and care experienced children and young people to ensure they have active involvement in all areas of decision making which affects their lives; we need to support the families of our looked after children; we need to know that we are making the same decisions for looked after children as we would make for our own children, so there is no difference between the lives of children in care and their peers. A corporate parent needs to do at least what it would expect a good parent to do.’

However, young people felt that when listening to children and young people’s views, corporate parents should:

“really listen and understand, really understand why the young person may have a certain view on an issue”.

Other actions which young people felt should be focused on by corporate parents in 2021–2024 included:

- “Scottish Borders Council [should] take the approach of other councils when it comes to funding student accommodation.”
- “Adopt a more informal approach to looked after young people but still having the structure and stability in the background. For example, Looked After Children Reviews feel more like a ‘let’s tick boxes, we are doing our jobs’ thing rather than a ‘we actually care’ thing, which is obviously not the case but that’s what they feel like. Try and make them feel more like a ‘casual family meeting thing.”
- “Make sure there is someone in meetings who is 100% on the young person’s side.”

These suggestions clearly fall within the scope of the Promise and the Scottish Borders Corporate Parenting Ambition and will be addressed within the context of Relationships, Moving On and Advocacy.

2.4 How will we achieve this?

The Five Priority Areas of the national Promise Plan provide a clear framework to make the planned changes necessary to improve outcomes for looked after and care experienced children and young people. The Scottish Borders Corporate Parenting Ambition – Plan for 2021 – 2024 shows clear action areas for specific service developments and improvements. These are complimented by more detailed service and organisation plans.

The Action Plan will be reviewed on an on-going basis by the Corporate Parenting Operations Group who will in turn report to the multi-agency Children and Young People's Leadership Group / Strategic Group.

Consultation and participation will take place with looked after children and their families and carers in order to inform policy, service development and delivery for looked after children in the Scottish Borders. 'The balance of power must be upended so that listening to children and young people is always the basis of all decisions made about their lives'.

GOVERNANCE

Governance of Corporate Parenting in the Scottish Borders is managed through the multi-agency Children and Young People's Leadership Group (chaired and co-ordinated by Scottish Borders Council) which in turn reports to the Community Planning Partnership. The Children and Young People's Leadership Group will be replaced by a Strategic Corporate Parenting Board by autumn 2021.

This Strategy and Ambition has a duration of three years and aligns with the national Promise Action Plan and broader framework of the Scottish Borders Community Plan (published by the Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership). Sitting within the Community Planning Partnership is the Children and Young People's Planning Partnership which is guided by its Integrated Children and Young People's Plan 2021-2023. The 4 priorities of the Plan are keeping children and young people safe; improving health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities; targeting support to maximise life experiences and opportunities and ensuring inclusion; and, increasing participation and engagement. Improving the well-being and life changes of our most vulnerable children and young people is at the heart of the Integrated Children and Young People's Plan and this Corporate Parenting Strategy is a key part of addressing these priorities. The Corporate Parenting Operations Group is responsible for evidencing improved outcomes for our looked after children and care experienced young people in the Scottish Borders. The action plan will be evaluated and updated on an on-going basis, reporting directly to the Children and Young People's Leadership / Strategic Group. Looked after and care experienced children and young people's voices will be heard at all levels of corporate parenting governance as approaches to participation are developed and embedded within the Scottish Borders.

APPENDIX 1

Scottish Borders Corporate Parenting Ambition (based on The Promise Five Foundations and Plan 21-24)

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The Scottish Borders Corporate Parenting Ambition is a headline Action Plan. The Ambition is complimented by a more detailed Corporate Parenting Action Plan which specifies both single agency and partnership developments for looked after and care experienced children and young people.

APPENDIX 2

Schedule 4 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 defines who Corporate Parents are:

1. The Scottish Ministers
2. A local authority
3. The National Convener of Children’s Hearings Scotland
4. Children’s Hearings Scotland
5. The Principal Reporter
6. The Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration
7. A health board
8. A board constituted under section 2(1)(b) of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978
9. Healthcare Improvement Scotland
10. The Scottish Qualifications Authority
11. Skills Development Scotland Co. Ltd (registered number SC 202659)
12. Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland
13. The Scottish Social Services Council
14. The Scottish Sports Council
15. The chief constable of the Police Service of Scotland
16. The Scottish Police Authority
17. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
18. The Scottish Legal Aid Board
19. The Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland
20. The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland
21. The Scottish Housing Regulator
22. Bòrd na Gàidhlig
23. Creative Scotland
24. A body which is a “post-16 education body” for the purposes of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005



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