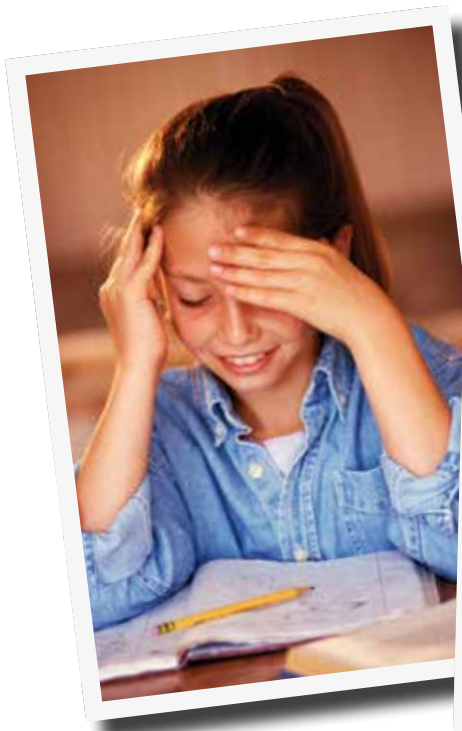
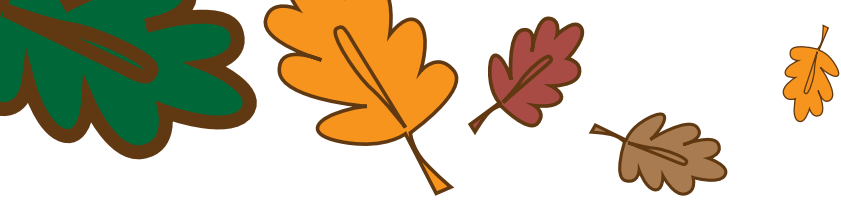
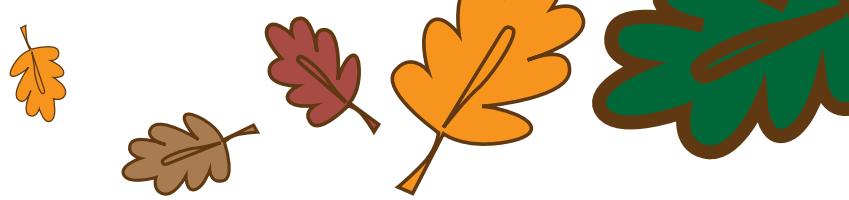




Corporate Parenting

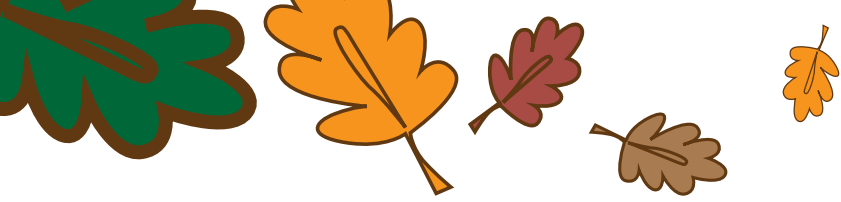
A Guide for Elected Members in Torfaen

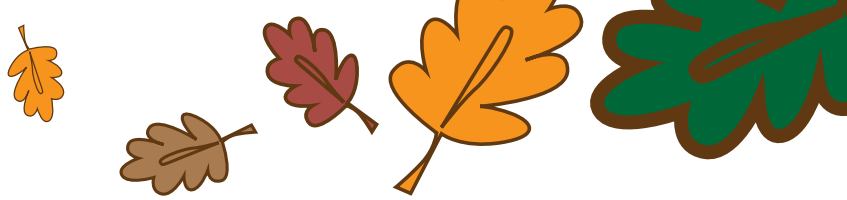




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An Open Letter

from the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive

December 2013

Dear Elected Member

WELCOME TO THE CORPORATE PARENTING HANDBOOK!

We are pleased to present the **Corporate Parenting Handbook**, which has been written to help you understand the authority's responsibilities for children and young people who are Looked After.

The role of the Corporate Parent for Looked After Children is arguably the most important role of a Council. We have a legal and moral duty to provide the level of support, care and protection any good parent would give to their children. This includes promoting their health, education, social and emotional needs.

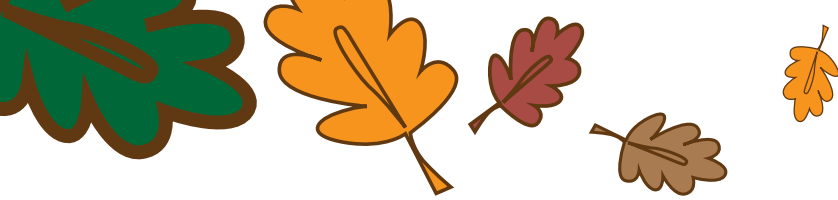
The term 'Corporate Parent' recognises that meeting the diverse needs of these young people requires co-operation between Council service areas and other organisations, such as health, education, the police and partner agencies.

This handbook has been put together to help you to play an active part in ensuring that the most vulnerable children and young people, especially those Looked After, get the best possible start in life to enable them to lead fuller, more successful lives as adults.

We hope the **Corporate Parenting Handbook** will provide you with some insight into your responsibility as a Corporate Parent, in improving the well-being and life chances of Looked After Children.

Bob Wellington
Leader of the Council

Alison Ward
Chief Executive



Overview

This handbook has been developed by Torfaen Social Care and Housing Children & Family Services to provide you, as an Elected Member, with an overview of your Corporate Parenting responsibilities for children and young people who are Looked After by the Council.

The role of the Corporate Parent for Looked After Children is perhaps the most important one you have. Elected Members and the Council as a whole, have a legal and moral duty to provide the level of support, care and protection any good parent would give to their own children. This includes promoting their health, education, social and emotional needs. This responsibility remains with Elected Members and the Council even when young people are no longer being Looked After, for example when a young person has left care and is in higher education, up to the age of 24.

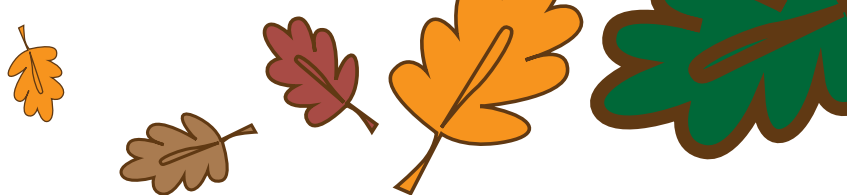
The term “Corporate Parenting” recognises that meeting all the developmental needs of children and young people requires co-operation between Council departments and with partner agencies such as health and partners in the voluntary sector. As a Corporate Parent, when you consider the quality of care and opportunities Looked After Children receive, you must always ask yourself, “would this be good enough for my child?”

The *Corporate Parenting Handbook* explains how the Children & Family Services Division is structured and tells you what individual teams do. It explains why and how the Social Care and Housing Service become involved with children and families, and explains what happens if a child or young person becomes Looked After by the Council. Short break services available for disabled children and young people are outlined and your role as an Elected Member and Corporate Parent is explained in detail.

There are a range of placements available to meet the individual needs of children and young people who need to be Looked After and these are detailed, as well as arrangements to ensure their safety. There is also a section about Adoption.

This handbook also provides a description of legislation and major Government initiatives which affect children in need and children and young people who are Looked After, including the advocacy services that are available to children and young people. The complaints procedure is explained and a brief explanation of the role of the Children’s Commissioner for Wales.

Finally, this handbook provides the legal and policy framework governing services for children and young people.



Children and Family Services and its Teams

The principal aim of Children and Family Services is to ensure that children are safeguarded through clear processes and quality engagement with vulnerable children and young people in need and their families.

This is achieved by offering a range of services which, wherever possible, support a child or young person to remain living with their own family and in their local community. Where this is not possible and it is necessary for children and young people to be cared for away from their family, the emphasis is on placing them in foster care and maintaining links with their local communities.

Framework for Assessment

'The National Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families' provides a way of looking at, understanding and recording what is happening to children and families, ensuring the involvement of other agencies such as health, education and voluntary agencies. The Framework for Assessment provides statutory timescales for work to be undertaken with families which form part of a suite of performance indicators for the Division and the Council. There are currently 46 key performance indicators around children and young people which are the responsibility of Children and Family Services within Social Care and Housing.

Children and Family Services aim to function in the most effective and efficient way and in accordance with the Framework for Assessment and other legislation, guidance and policy set by central government; Welsh Government and local government. To carry out these responsibilities Children and Family Services is structured into a range of teams.

Customer Care

The Corporate Customer Care Centre is the initial point of contact for all enquiries and referrals from the public and professionals.

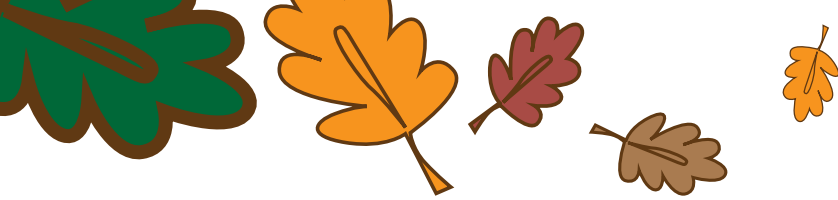
Customer Care staff are trained and professionally supported to provide appropriate advice, to 'signpost' enquirers to other services and where appropriate forward referrals to the most appropriate team.

Operational Teams in the Borough

- Children & Family South 1
- Children & Family South 2

- Children & Family North 1
- Children & Family North 2

Referrals for the South and the North are responded to through a core hub of experienced child protection staff, based in Stadium House for the South, covering all South Wards (Ponthir - Cwmbran) and at the Civic Centre in the North, covering all North Wards from New Inn, Griffithstown, Pontypool and Blaenavon. The duty Senior Social Worker/ Assistant Team Manager screen each referral to identify what, if any, immediate intervention or support services may be needed. Clear eligibility criteria are applied to prioritise all referrals.



For those referrals requiring services or support, the child, young person and their family are assessed using the Framework for Assessment.

The focus of the Division is on keeping families together, but also acknowledges the Council's legal duty to safeguard and protect children. Sometimes a child may not be able to remain living in their own home and it is necessary for children and young people to come into the care of the local authority. This is known as being *Looked After*.

The teams have responsibility for managing all cases that will require the Council to have a significant and on going involvement. This includes children and young people who are assessed as *in need* of on going social work support. It includes those children and young people who require protection through a multi-agency Child Protection Plan, those who may need to be Looked After by the Council and those who require permanent care away from their families, such as Adoption. The teams are therefore often involved in working with the courts to ensure the best plans for children and young people are achieved.

16+ Team

The 16+ Team, based at The Studio in Old Cwmbbran, forms an integral part of the Torfaen Young People's Support Service (TYPSS) and works with Looked After Children from their 16th birthday supporting them within their placements and helping them prepare for the transition to young adulthood. The team support young people through leaving the care of the local authority and ultimately independent living. Each young person has a Pathway Plan which is a clear action plan focusing on the future. This Plan prioritises education and employment opportunities and considers financial assistance and help with housing. The team continues to support Looked After Children and young people until they reach their 21st birthday or 24th birthday for those in full-time high education. TYPSS provides support, advice and guidance to young people in need such as homeless 16 and 17 year olds. The team aims to empower and enable young people to realise their potential and ensure that as they reach adulthood, they are not isolated and are able to participate socially and economically as citizens.

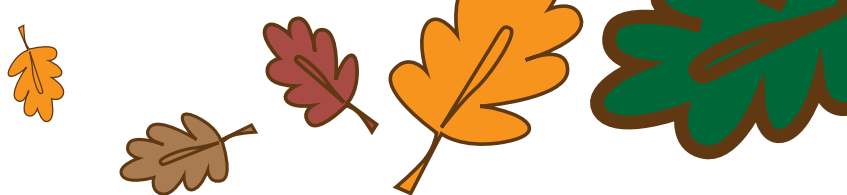
Family Placement Team

The Family Placement Team, based in the Civic Centre provides and manages the regulated fostering service for the Council. This includes foster care placements for children and young people who are Looked After including short breaks and respite care and where necessary identifies potential placements in a residential setting. The team is responsible for the recruitment, assessment and on going support of foster carers who can meet the diverse needs of children who may need short-term foster care, permanent placements or supported lodgings placements. The team and fostering service is inspected against National Minimum Standards annually by CSSIW.

Adoption in Torfaen – South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS)

The South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) was established in 2011 through a partnership with Monmouthshire County Council and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. In 2014 Caerphilly County Borough Council and Newport City Council joined SEWAS to establish a Regional Collaborative as part of the Welsh Government plan to establish a National Adoption Service for Wales, with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council remaining the host Authority for the Regional Collaborative. The team is responsible for the recruitment, assessment and support of prospective adopters and adoptive placements including birth parent and post adoption support.





The Family Resource Team

The Family Resource Team, based at the Family Centre in Wesley Street, Cwmbran provides direct services to children and young people in need and Looked After Children.

The team's work falls into five main areas:

- Supervised contact between Looked After Children and their families
- Community-based assessments including parenting assessments and assessments for Court
- Direct work both individually and in groups around a range of identified needs
- Family Focus Service, based at Fairfield House Pontypool, which works in partnership with families to prevent escalation of need where there is a risk of child protection registration or of entry into the care of the local authority. The small staff group is trained in motivational interviewing (MI) which is a model promoted through Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS), a Welsh Government initiative. Family Focus will work in partnership with Monmouthshire County Council and Newport City Council to deliver this innovative work
- Torfaen Young Carers are supported by a qualified social worker who provides assessment and support to those children and young people who undertake caring duties within their families. All children and young people are assessed using the Framework for Assessment to ensure that wider safeguarding issues are considered and appropriate support services for the whole family are able to be accessed.

Disabled Children's Team

The team is based in Serennu Children's Centre in Newport, but have local bases within Torfaen. They provide dedicated assessment and support services for disabled children and young people and their families. The team undertakes the screening and assessment process for all referrals for disabled children and young people in Torfaen. The team includes integrated Occupational Therapy and specialist Key Worker/Care Co-ordination posts and works very closely with health and education colleagues to ensure holistic assessments of need. The team provides a range of support services including the provision of short breaks services, access to Direct Payments and assistance in accessing community-based activities, summer play schemes and specialist Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) services.

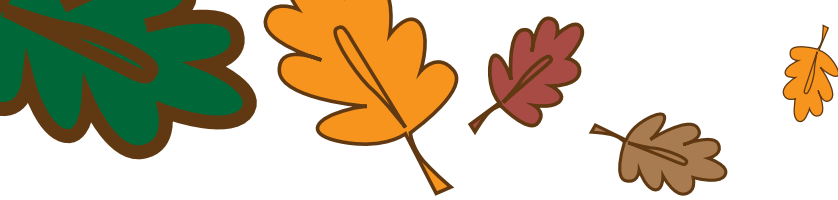
Looked After Children Team

The Looked After Children Team aims to provide a quality and effective service for children who become Looked After by Torfaen County Borough Council.

The team comprises of a LAC Co-ordinator, one Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS), three external Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and two Administrators.

An IRO is responsible for reviewing a child's care plan and placement to ensure the relevant assessments are in place. The outcome of these assessments determine a child's long-term care plan and ensures their foster care placement meets their needs in terms of a safe secure stable placement. An IRO also acts as an auditor for the reviewing process and ensures the statutory requirements are met by the child's Social Worker.

A CNS undertakes an Initial Health Assessment of each child and will complete an Action Plan which identifies any outstanding health needs. The LAC Health Assessments are statutory requirements which are subsequently carried out 6 monthly or annually dependent on the child/young persons age.



The Team Administrators ensure all LAC Reviews and LAC Health Assessments take place within the statutory timescales and that reports are circulated promptly.

Safeguarding Unit

The Safeguarding Unit is a multi-disciplinary team spanning both child protection and adult protection work. The unit's main objective is to develop processes and practice to improve the safeguarding of vulnerable people between the two service areas.

The unit is responsible for taking forward the safeguarding agenda for both children and adults and the co-ordination and oversight of statutory multi-agency meetings to assess risk and plan investigations of alleged abuse. It therefore works closely with colleagues in Gwent Police, health, housing, education and the voluntary sector. The unit also supports operational teams to undertake their own statutory responsibilities in child and adult protection work.

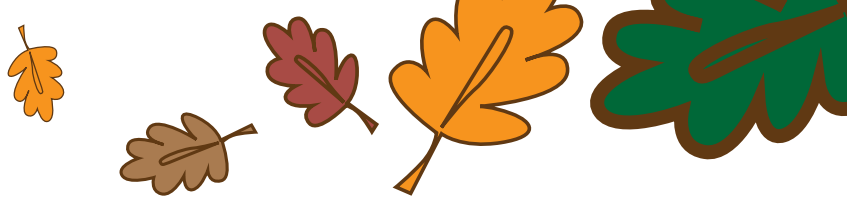
Youth Offending Service

The Youth Offending Service operates on a partnership basis between Torfaen and Monmouthshire County Council, Gwent Probation Service, Gwent Police and Aneurin Bevan Health Board. The team includes workers from the various agencies and has the remit to prevent and reduce the rate of youth crime within Torfaen and Monmouthshire. The Youth Offending Service is currently managed on behalf of the partnership by Monmouthshire County Council and is based in Mamhilad.

The Youth Justice plan for Torfaen and Monmouthshire 2012/14 is produced in accordance with the duty imposed by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 for each local authority to formulate and implement a youth justice plan each year.

The plan aims to examine key trends within the national and local youth justice system and determine local responses. In addition the plan acknowledges the ever changing landscape in the world of criminal justice, particularly recent, current and future changes linked to funding, objectives and agenda of the coalition government, local priorities and potential changes to service delivery.

The team's work includes addressing the offending behaviour of young people and working with their families to reduce the likelihood of them committing further offences. They provide a range of parenting support groups; preventative services and restorative justice programmes.



Commissioned Services

Multi Disciplinary Intervention Service Torfaen (MIST)

The project, provided in partnership with Education, the Health Board and delivered by Action for Children, aims to keep children and young people with very complex emotional and behavioural needs in their community and to bring children and young people who may have to be placed 'out of area' back to the Torfaen area.

The project focuses on very intensive interventions from a wide range of disciplines, including clinical psychologists, social workers, education workers, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and specialist therapeutic foster carers.

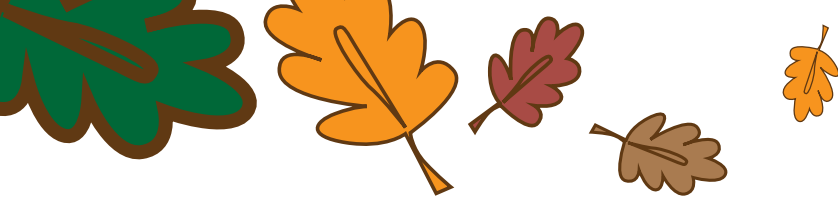
The Family Placement Team is responsible for the recruitment and support of therapeutic Foster Carers, who are paid a contract fee in addition to the usual fostering allowances. These therapeutic foster carers are central to the success of the project and carers are supported to manage very challenging need.

Tafarn Newydd

In partnership with Action for Children and Torfaen Opportunity Group (TOG's), this service for disabled children, young people and their families offers parenting support. This includes support around early diagnosis, pre-school support, short breaks support (including specialist ASD services and weekend respite), alongside support with integration into wider community-based activities.

Advocacy

The legislative requirement to provide independent advocacy is met through service delivery from NYAS Cymru in partnership with Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly County Borough Councils. Children and young people are entitled to independent advocacy support and the services provided range from representing young people at meetings, supporting young people to receive appropriate services and supporting young people to make formal representations to agencies. In addition, NYAS supports young people to participate in service developments including the production of public information, the tendering of services and the appointments process for key staff.



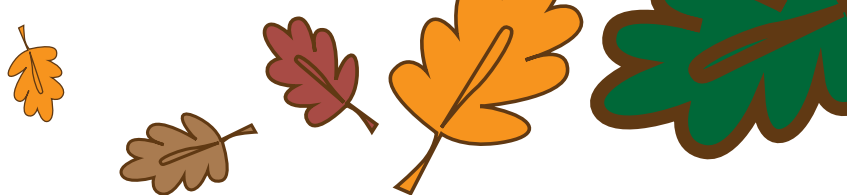
How do Children and Family Services become involved with Children, Young People and their Families?

The 1989 Children Act and associated pieces of legislation place a range of duties and responsibilities for children and young people on Torfaen County Borough Council and inform the work of Children and Family Services. The Act requires the Council to provide a range and level of services suitable to meet the assessed needs of children, young people and their families.

Children and Family Services receive referrals; requests for support or concerns about children from a range of sources, including health visitors, GPs, schools, Elected Members, the Police, members of the community and families themselves. The needs of children, young people and their families can be complex and require the different teams to work with other professionals to share expertise and provide services.

There are many reasons why people get in touch with Children and Family Services. Some examples include;

- To ask for help for a child or young person who has a disability or other additional needs
- Because a child/young person has been harmed by someone within the family
- Because a child/young person is not being cared for adequately
- The child/young person's parents or carers need help with their problems.



What Happens when Children and Family Services Receive a Referral?

All referrals are screened to determine the individual needs of the child, young person and their parents or carers and to establish if the Council should provide support and services. Where appropriate an assessment is completed with the family and other relevant professionals who may have knowledge of the family, such as doctors, teachers, voluntary sector and the Police. This assessment, known as a child's initial assessment, is expected to be completed within seven working days.

The Council has a duty to support children and young people who are 'in need' and to support families to look after their children. This may include providing services, advice and guidance or financial assistance.

When a child or young person has been harmed or neglected or there are concerns that they may be at risk of being harmed or neglected then the assessment will commence immediately.

When the assessment has been completed there are a range of potential outcomes which can include:

Direction to other Services

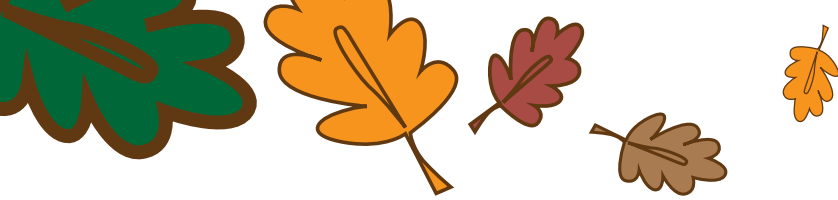
It may be the case that it is appropriate to refer the child, young person and the family on to another service, for example the health visitor, Benefits Agency or a voluntary organisation that provides services directly to children and their families. In such cases there may be no further involvement from Children and Family Services.

Children in Need Support

If it is decided that the child or young person and their family will receive services from Children and Family Services, a written Child in Need Plan is developed explaining the ways in which the support will be provided including what the family may need to do themselves and for how long services may be provided. This plan is then reviewed at regular intervals.

Safeguarding/Child Protection Support

If the child or young person has been harmed or there is reason to believe he/she may suffer harm, a Child Protection Conference may be convened. This is a multi-agency meeting attended by professionals and parents, and by the child or young person when appropriate. Professionals share any information and concerns, both past and present about the family that may assist the conference. The only decision that the Child Protection Conference can make is whether a child or young person's name is placed on the Child Protection Register. If their name is placed on the register the Child Protection Conference will develop an outline multi-agency Child Protection Plan with the family which is then further developed through a Core Group made up of key professionals and the family themselves. The Child Protection Plan is then regularly reviewed at subsequent Child Protection Review Conferences until such time as the multi agency decision is taken to de-register the child. Sometimes, this may be because the child has had to come into the care of the local authority.



Looked After Services

For some children and young people, it is necessary for them to be Looked After by the Council. This may need to happen because it is not safe for them to remain living at home or because a parent is ill and there is no other family member who could help. A plan will be agreed with the parent, child or young person and other relevant professionals that will ensure all the needs of the child/young person are addressed. This plan will be regularly reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The majority of children and young people become Looked After as a result of child protection concerns around safety from emotional, physical or sexual abuse or neglect.

What Happens if a Child or Young Person becomes 'Looked After' by the Council?

The Council is required by legislation to promote the upbringing of children and young people by their families. However, there are cases in which it is not possible for children to remain living with their family.

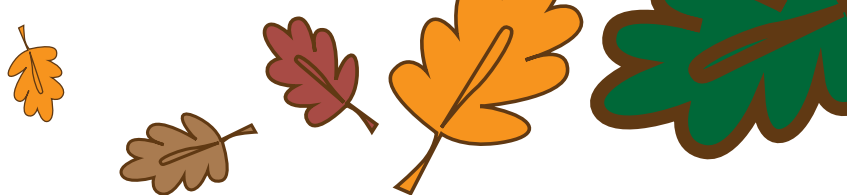
The Council requires the permission of a parent or person with parental responsibility before it is able to 'look after' a child/young person. If a parent refuses permission and the Council feels that there are significant risks to the child should they remain at home, the local authority will ask the Court for a Magistrate or Judge to make a decision. Consequently some children are Looked After under Section 20 of the Children Act with their parent's permission and some are subject to a Care Order, where the Courts have decided that the children's needs take precedence over the parent's wishes.

If the child or young person is accommodated under voluntary arrangements birth parents retain all their parental responsibilities. However, where there is a legal order in place, birth parents share their parental responsibilities with the Council.

A key principle of the Children Act 1989 is that Local Authorities must work in partnership with parents. There is a presumption that unless there are exceptional circumstances, the Authority will promote contact between children and young people who are Looked After and their parents.

All children who are accommodated either with parental consent or by Court Order must have a Care Plan. The Care Plan outlines the reason the child/young person is Looked After and sets out how their individual needs will be met by the Council and partner agencies. The Care Plan is reviewed regularly by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who ensures that the needs of the child are being met and that the Council is fulfilling its statutory responsibilities. Some children and young people are accommodated for a few days or weeks, perhaps while their parents receive some help, others need longer while more permanent arrangements for their care are made.





Your Role as an Elected Member and Corporate Parent

Corporate Parenting Principles

Parents hold together many strands in their children's lives: they care about their safety, health, education, leisure interests, friendships and their futures. For Looked After Children, just as for children who remain at home with their families, care and education are closely linked. A child or young person who is settled and supported will have a greater chance of taking advantage of education opportunities and achieving their full potential.

Corporate Parenting emphasises the collective responsibility of a Council, in conjunction with all statutory and non-statutory bodies, to contribute to raising standards for Looked After Children.

Corporate Parenting is the responsibility all Elected Members have to all Torfaen's Looked After Children.

Your role as an Elected Member and Corporate Parent for Looked After children is arguably the most important one you have. You are responsible for ensuring the effective care and protection of all Looked After Children by the Council and ensuring the promotion of their general well being, development and life chances, so that they can expect to do at least as well as their peers.

The Council cannot equal the love parents are able to give to their children; however it must work to provide stable and caring placements that offer a firm foundation for them to develop into adulthood. This includes promoting their health, encouraging their social development, raising their educational achievements and safeguarding them from abuse or neglect.

These same responsibilities apply to young people leaving care, whether for education, training or in their first steps towards independent living or holding down a job.

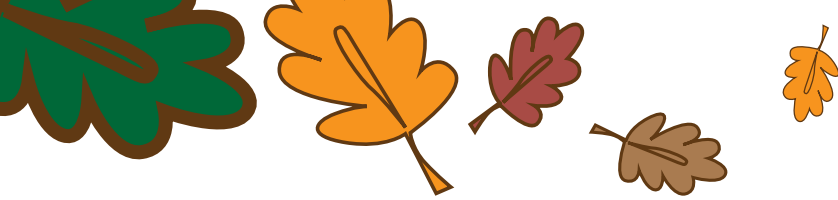
Therefore when thinking about children and young people in the Council's care, you need to ask yourself:

- **What if this was my child?**
- **Would it be good enough for them?**
- **Would this be good enough for me?**

The Questions You Need to be Asking

As an Elected Member it is important that you ask, and receive satisfactory answers, to the following type of questions:

- Are Looked After Children safeguarded?
- Have they got good homes in a secure, caring environment?
- Are they thriving and developing socially and emotionally as they should?



Make sure you are regularly updated on issues affecting children and young people and how the Council is performing in relation to performance indicators.

Making Decisions

When making any decision as an Elected Member, whether it is in relation to bus routes, library opening hours, building a new road or developing a new housing estate, think about its impact upon children and young people.

Listening to Children and Young People

It is important that you meet with children and young people and listen to their views. This is especially important for Looked After Children.

Contact and communication is important both for Elected Members and the children and young people themselves. For Elected Members it can help them understand why they must take their responsibilities seriously. For the children and young people it is an opportunity to express their views and concerns directly to those with ultimate policymaking responsibility and authority.

Communication between children, young people, their carers and the Council and its Elected Members can be complicated because there are issues of confidentiality and respect and the needs and interests of the child must come first. It can be particularly challenging to find appropriate ways to ensure the voices of very young children are heard and to develop effective dialogue with children in foster care. It is important not to intrude into their personal matters and to create an atmosphere in which young people feel free to say what they really think.

The Council has begun developing different ways of engaging with children and young people and seeking their views on the services that it provides. Torfaen has a **Youth Forum** which is designed to facilitate the input of children and young people into the Council's planning processes. Looked After Children are specifically consulted about the design, structure, issues and priorities of the forum and they are also encouraged to represent the interests of all Looked After Children. The issues they raise need to be fed through to the Council's Cabinet Committees, Service Area Chief Officers and Executive Members.

Young People are Citizens too

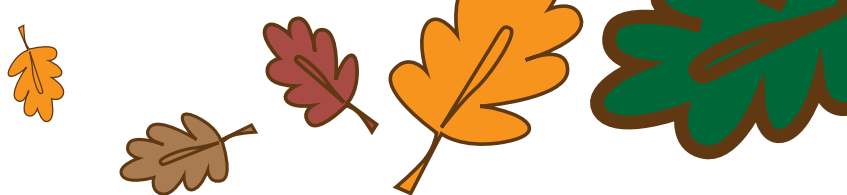
Young people are citizens too and many are constituents. Foster Carers and families of children in need are also voters and constituents. Young people need to know who their Elected Members are and how they can get in touch. That way you can hear their views on services and on issues that affect them. They may ask for your advice or help and you can act for them as you would for your other constituents. Elected Members need to have the opportunity to hear directly about young people's issues.

As an Elected Member, you have an important part to play in helping young people to take an active civic role as they grow into adults. If they are to become active citizens, they need to see how the Council is relevant to them now.

Be a Champion for Children

'Think child' is an important motto, but integrating it with other priorities may pose a challenge. As you get to know more about the children in your care, you feel that their claims are a priority, but not everyone will share that view.





There are many prejudices about children and young people 'in care'. Many people believe that all children are put into care because they have committed an offence or have unacceptable behaviour. However, most children come into care because of family breakdown or because a Court decided that they needed to be kept safe from abuse or neglect.

Prejudices hurt the children who are your responsibility, when they may already be coping with the loss of their family and other changes. In your community leadership role, you need to get across to the public the high priority Torfaen Council gives to the welfare of the children in its care.

You must have high expectations, and make sure that young people and children achieve the best and that these achievements are recognised. You must value diversity and ensure that the Council services respect different traditions and cultures.

Looking After Children and Young People in Torfaen

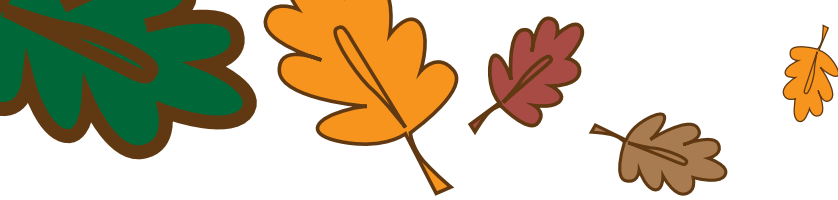
The accommodation of children and young people is part of a continuum of services provided for children and young people in need; the aim, wherever possible, is to maintain them within their birth families. Where this is not possible and children and young people are assessed to be in need of accommodation, the emphasis is on placing them in foster care and maintaining links with their communities.

The Council has a responsibility to safeguard and promote the child's welfare and to enable and encourage parents to undertake full parental responsibility as long as it is in the child or young person's best interest. We aim to keep brothers and sisters together and ensure appropriate placements are available as near to their home as possible. Children and Family Services always try to ensure that children and young people maintain contact with their own family network (where possible and appropriate) in their own communities.

There are no residential children's homes in Torfaen. Children and Family Services are able to provide foster care placements in Torfaen for most children who need to be Looked After. However, there are a small proportion of children and young people who require specialist placements due to their particular difficulties. Where this is necessary an appropriate placement will be identified either with a specialist foster care agency or with a residential establishment.

All applicants to become foster carers in Torfaen are assessed to determine if they are suitable to look after children on behalf of the Authority. In addition, if the assessment is successful and approved through the Fostering Panel, they receive on going support and training. To unify the quality and consistency of care for children and young people who are Looked After, the Government has introduced National Minimum Standards for Foster Care. The Council is required to meet these national standards and is inspected annually by CSSIW.

To meet the needs of children and young people who are Looked After a variety of placements are available within Torfaen:



Foster Placements – children and young people (including those with very challenging behaviour) live with foster carers in the carer’s own home.

Short Breaks – these services provide community-based respite care and support for those children and young people with physical and learning disabilities and additional needs.

Supported Lodgings – these placements are approved and provide support for young people who are moving towards living independently.

Kinship/Specific Approved Foster Carers/Relatives or Friends – these are relatives or friends who have been through the fostering assessment process and been approved specifically for individual children.

Placement with Parents – a number of children and young people subject of legal Care Orders are placed at home with their parents, where this has been assessed as being appropriate and safe to do so, subject to the Placement with Parents Regulations. Social work support and the LAC Planning and Reviewing Procedures continue even though the child or young person is living at home. Parental responsibility continues to be shared.

‘Out of Area’ Placements – if it is not possible for a child or young person to be Looked After in Torfaen, often because their needs are complex, arrangements are in place to ensure that appropriate placements outside of Torfaen can be made. These are subject to a contract and would generally be part of an All Wales Framework agreement.

Secure Accommodation Placement on Welfare Grounds – these are very specialist, short term placements and are only used for young people who are posing such a high risk in the community or may be assessed as being a risk to themselves or to others. Placements can only be made through the Courts. Placement at a Secure Unit through the Criminal Justice System may be part of a punishment for crimes committed and will be subject to a different Court directive.

Looked After Children (LAC) Documentation

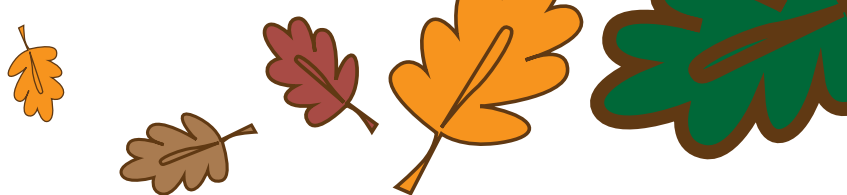
Torfaen uses the Department of Health Looked After Children documentation in line with the rest of the UK. These documents aim to promote improved parenting experiences and outcomes for children who are Looked After by the Council. The materials are age specific and set out a number of aims that a reasonable parent might be expected to hold for any child. They also require that plans made for Looked After Children are rigorously recorded and acted upon.

Social Workers have a duty to complete various forms when children are Looked After by the Authority. These written documents include Care Plans, Review of Placement forms and other essential information. This documentation ensures that those responsible for children’s care consider all aspects of their lives and that any actions agreed are actually followed through and acted upon. It also encourages all agencies to work together to ensure that children reach their potential.

Integrated Children’s System (ICS)

In Torfaen, we use a data information system called DRAIG. Integral to this system, we use ICS; the electronic recording system which has been developed by the Welsh Government and the Department of Health to improve the outcomes of Social Worker intervention and how this is managed. A framework has been developed with common forms to be used across Wales and attempts to ensure that all Councils follow a common approach to improving outcomes for children and young people. There is much on going work at a national level looking at how improvements can be made to data systems so that less time is spent inputting information and more time can be available to spend with families.





Safeguarding Looked After Children

In Torfaen, almost all Looked After Children are placed in foster care as opposed to a residential care setting.

Children and young people in foster care have a right to expect that they will receive the appropriate care, encouragement, safety and security that good parents provide. It is the responsibility of the Council, as Corporate Parent, to do its best to secure this.

In recent years there have been widespread concerns about the level of safety and protection and the quality of care and services provided to children living away from home. The National Minimum Standards for Foster Care aim to ensure that the specific needs and rights of each child or young person in foster care are met and respected. They are designed to deliver better outcomes for children and young people who are cared for away from home.

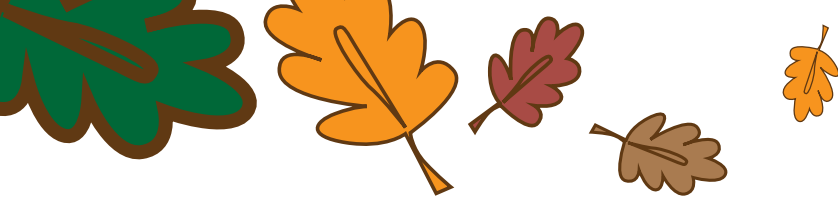
Councils must ensure that each child or young person in foster care is safeguarded and protected from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

An All Wales Protocol around children who go missing has been developed and **'Breaking the Cycle'**, a multi-agency hub based in Mamhilad, is available to risk assess and support young people who go missing in Gwent.

Research shows that children and young people put themselves at risk when they go missing, for example becoming involved in illegal activities such as drug misuse, crime and sexual exploitation. The protocol gives clear advice to foster carers, parents, police officers and social workers, in dealing with situations where children go missing and helps to ensure that every effort is made to find them as quickly as possible. Equally they will be given the opportunity to talk to somebody independently about anything that is troubling them and perhaps causing them to run away.

The team will:

- Ensure all stakeholders are aware that a child has been reported as missing
- Collect and collate all current information from stakeholders
- Speak with family or carers
- Produce a full risk assessment
- Refer the child/young person to an independent debrief



Educational and Health Needs

The Educational Needs of Looked After Children

Parents play an extremely important role in the education of their children. They express preferences for schools and appeal against decisions which they feel will harm their children's future chances; they attend parents' evenings and sports days; they expect to be consulted and involved if their child has special educational needs. Parental partnership and robust home-school links are equally vital for Looked After children.

Prioritising Education

All children are entitled to a good education, including those in the care of the Council. School is an important part of everyday life, it is a place where young people develop self confidence, learn about and build relationships, and receive praise and encouragement. School is where Looked After Children can be "like everyone else", and it can provide much needed continuity.

Inclusion – Changing Attitudes

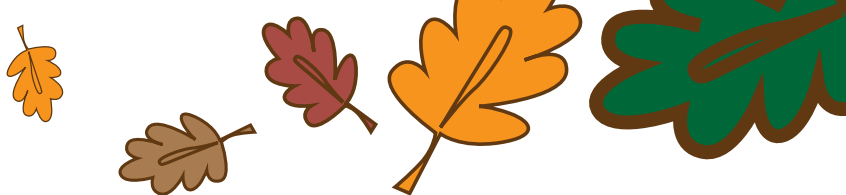
Valuing and supporting the education of children and young people in public care is a primary responsibility for you as an Elected Member and Corporate Parent. By providing access to good educational opportunities we are investing in and caring about the future of all children. This means ensuring that Looked After Children have equal access to the full range of educational provision and that their individual needs are sensitively and promptly met. For the vast majority of Looked After Children this will be their local mainstream school.

Corporate Parents need to be confident that policies both at school and Council level embrace the circumstances of Looked After Children and do not single them out or discriminate against them in any way because they do not live at home with their families. Where a parental advocate is needed to access any service or support, the Council as Corporate Parent must ensure that all children in their care have an effective champion. Schools, Education Service and the Social Care & Housing Service should be confident that their anti bullying strategies and inclusion/equal opportunities policies encompass Looked After Children.

Looked After pupils should have equal access to the National Curriculum and associated tests, and to public examinations and careers guidance. They should be encouraged and enabled to take part in extra-curricular activities and school trips. They should also be encouraged to arrange work activities, work experience, and seek additional educational support when needed.

Achieving Placement Stability

Stability and continuity are known to promote educational success for children in public care. There is a clear relationship between schooling difficulties and placement breakdown; one precipitating the other. Schools can provide the one source of continuity and stability in an otherwise turbulent and uncertain life. We aim to maintain the school placement wherever possible.



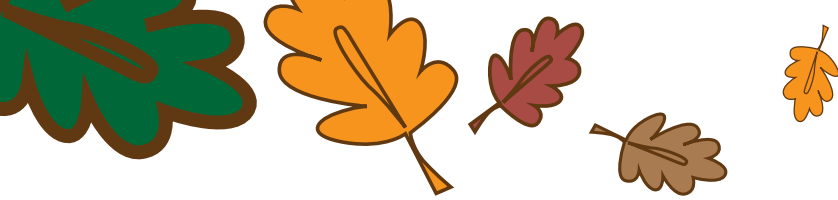
High Expectations – Raising Standards

Research has identified the lower expectations of Looked After Children, both in terms of achievement and behaviour, as well as lower aspirations on the part of those involved in Corporate Parenting. This stems from well-intentioned but mistaken assumptions that children who have endured traumatic events in their lives simply cannot take advantage of learning opportunities.

Early Intervention – Priority Action

Avoiding delay and taking positive action quickly should be shared objectives of all involved in Corporate Parenting. It is not acceptable for children to be out of school, except in exceptional and agreed circumstances. Looked After Children are identified as a vulnerable group at risk of disaffection and exclusion. Their care status should not mean that they are treated less favourably or that assumptions are made about their needs or behaviour. It should, however, act as a trigger for priority action by all involved in providing support services.





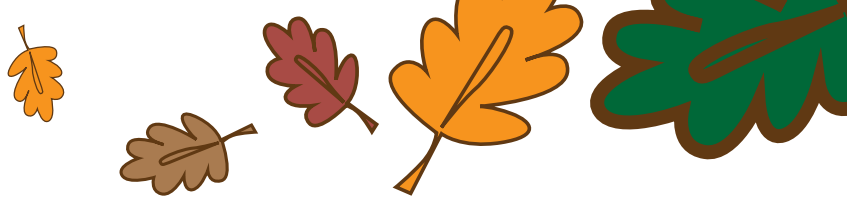
The Health Needs of Looked After Children

Evidence suggests that children and young people who are Looked After have more health needs than those children who live with their parents and are less likely to receive adequate attention for those needs.

It is vitally important to ensure that at a local level there are joint arrangements with all relevant agencies to ensure that the health needs of Looked After Children are approached holistically. These arrangements should also promote a healthy lifestyle as well as treatment.

Principles to meet the health care needs of children and young people should include:

- The Council should fulfil the role of an active concerned parent in promoting and monitoring the young person's health and development and should, where possible and appropriate, actively involve the child or young person's birth parents.
- Services should aim to promote the future health and wellbeing of children and young people and not focus solely on the detection of ill health.
- Services should be delivered in a way that enables and empowers children and young people to take appropriate responsibility for their own health.
- The health needs of Looked After Children and young people should be assessed within a child-centred holistic framework.
- Services should be non-discriminatory and promote equality of access.
- All agencies should recognise that children in public care may need higher levels of parenting and health input in order to achieve the same health outcomes as other children in the population.
- The child or young person's consent to all healthcare treatment should be actively sought and recorded in a way that recognises the importance of choice and accessibility.
- The organisation of services should take account of the needs of Looked After Children so that health issues are not made worse by frequent moves.



Children and Young People's Rights

Children's Commissioner for Wales

The first statutory Independent Children's Commissioner for Wales was appointed on 1st March 2001. The Children's Commissioner has the power to review the effects of policies and the delivery of services to children and young people in Wales and act as a champion for their rights and welfare. This remit includes ensuring that children and young people are safe from harm and abuse, are respected and valued, receive the life chances that they deserve and know about their rights under the UN convention. Although the Commissioner's remit usually only extends to those children under the age of 18, they have the power to act in relation to young people, in particular those who have been Looked After.

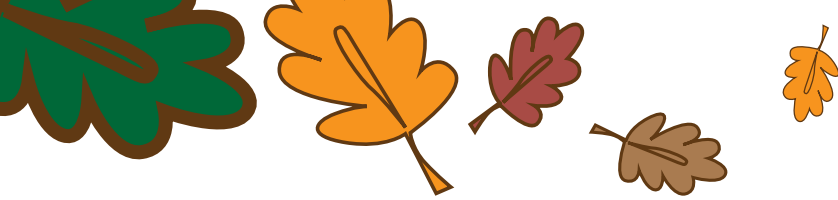
Young People Leaving Care

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 sets out the arrangements to help young people living in and leaving care to become independent and strengthens the Corporate Parenting role of the Council. As a Corporate Parent you will need to consider whether there are satisfactory arrangements when a child leaves the care of the Council.

The Council has a statutory duty to assess and meet the needs of 16 and 17 year olds who are in or who have left care. All Council services are expected to work together, with the voluntary and independent sectors, to co-ordinate service provision and promote independent living. Services provided may include finding suitable accommodation for the young person, assisting with education, training and employment opportunities and helping them to access leisure facilities.

The Council is also responsible for making financial payments to 16 and 17 year olds who may not be eligible for state benefits.

It is a statutory requirement that within three months of their 16th birthday, every young person leaving care has a multi-agency **Pathway Plan** that addresses their education, training and career plans and any other support they may require until they are 21. Pathway Plans do not seek to move young people out of care, but rather enable young people to plan for their futures and help them achieve their aspirations.



Legal and Policy Framework Governing Services for Children and Young People

The Children Act (1989)

The Children Act 1989 came into force on 14th October 1991 and brought together most public and private law relating to children in England and Wales.

The Act drew together legislation concerning the care and upbringing of children who were affected by a private dispute, such as divorce, those who are in need of help from a local authority and placed a number of duties and responsibilities upon Councils.

The Act:

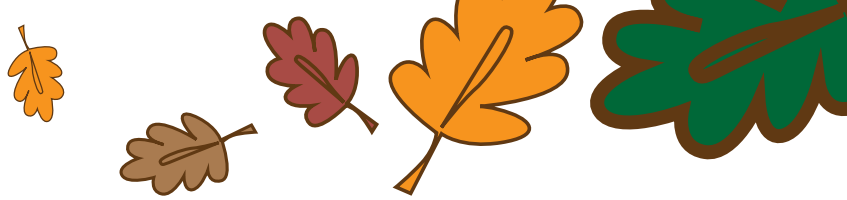
- Makes children's welfare a priority
- Believes that children are best brought up within their families whenever possible
- States that local authorities are to provide services which support children and families in need
- Promotes partnership between children, parents and local authorities.

Within the Act, children in need are identified as:

- Children who are at risk of significant harm and require protection
- Children who are disabled
- Children who need to be Looked After
- Children who have committed offences
- Children/young people leaving the care of the Local Authority
- Children who are unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health and/or development without the provision of services – family support.

The Crime and Disorder Act (1998)

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced new duties, responsibilities and direction for the provision of services to children and young people, and their families, in trouble with the law. The Act requires the development of local partnership Youth Offending Teams to work with young people to prevent offending behaviour as well as post-offending work. The Act introduced a number of new requirements including Parenting Orders and reparation to victims.



The Children Act 2004

The Act placed Children and Young People's Partnerships on a statutory footing and placed a duty on the Local Authority and key partner agencies to co-operate. Each Local Authority was required to designate a lead director and lead member for children and young people's services. Local Authorities were required to set up Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB's) with representatives from partner agencies. The Act also made provision for the sharing of information between agencies for the purposes of child protection and placed a duty on Local Authorities to promote the education of Looked After Children.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000)

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 places a duty on Councils to assess and meet the care and support needs of children leaving their care. Councils must keep in touch with care leavers, ensure they have a Pathway Plan, a personal adviser and suitable accommodation, and assist with the costs of education, training and employment. These duties recognise that parental support would not normally come to an abrupt end at the age of 16.

The Carers and Disabled Children Act (2000)

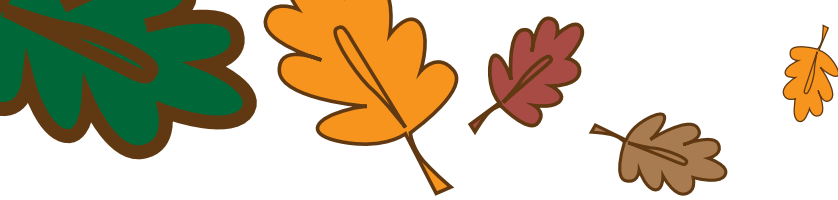
The Act gives Councils the power to offer Direct Payments to 16 and 17 year old disabled young people. The Local Authority makes the payment instead of arranging the services it has assessed the disabled young person as needing. The young person then uses the payment to secure the services needed. Every young person to whom Direct Payments are made must be able and willing to manage them (alone or with assistance). When deciding whether to offer a Direct Payment, an authority must consider each individual case. The views of the individual as well as the views of the parents must be taken into account.

Under the provisions of the Act, local authorities may also make direct payments to people with parental responsibility for a disabled child to purchase services to meet the assessed needs of the child's family.

Adoption and Children Act 2002

Principal aims:

- To increase Adoptions and other genuinely legally securing permanent placements
- Introduced a new legal order - special guardianship - for children who cannot go home but for whom adoption is not appropriate. The Council would no longer look after this group of children
- New adoptive families and special guardians now have the right to post-adoption support, and this can include financial assistance
- Prospective adopters now have recourse to an independent review if their application to become adopters is rejected by the Adoption Agency
- New time scales for planning for Looked After Children ensure arrangements for permanency are considered at an early stage and decisions are acted upon swiftly
- Establishment of an Adoption Register covering England and Wales with the aim of tackling delays in finding suitable adoptive placements for children.



Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Bill

The draft Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill was introduced in to the National Assembly for Wales on 28th January 2013 for consideration and scrutiny. This new legislation will provide the legal framework for improving the well-being of people who need care and support or support and to transform social services in Wales.

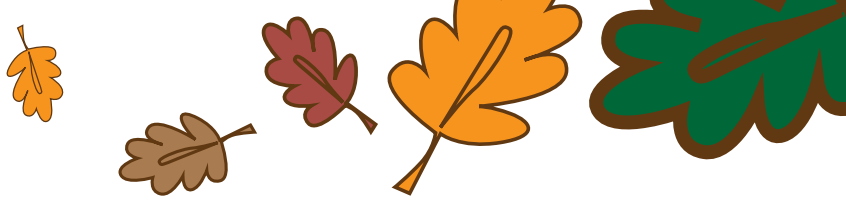
The Bill will transform the way social services are delivered, promoting people's independence to give them stronger voice and control.

Integration and simplification of the law will also provide greater consistency and clarity to:

- people who use social services,
- their carers,
- local authority staff and their partner organisations,
- the courts and the judiciary.

The Bill will promote equality, improve the quality of services and the provision of information people receive. It will also encourage a renewed focus on prevention and early intervention.





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This information handbook can be made available in other languages and formats upon request. Please contact Customer Care on 01495 762200.