

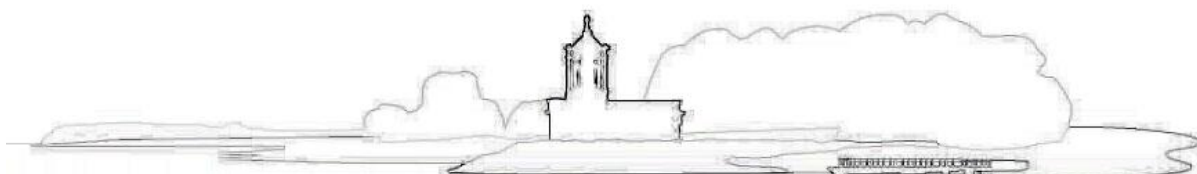


Rutland County Council

Corporate Parenting Strategy

Version & Policy Number	e.g. Version 2
Guardian	Colin Pennington HoS
Date Produced	April 2014
Next Review Date	April 2017

Approved by Scrutiny	
Approved by Cabinet	
Approved by Full Council	



1. Aims and scope of the Strategy

- 1.1 When a child becomes looked after, the Council becomes their Corporate Parent. This means that everyone who works for the Council and the councillors elected to serve on the Council and make decisions for Rutland have a special and important responsibility in fulfilling the corporate parent role. A child or young person is 'looked after' if they are subject to a Care Order or are being looked after under a voluntary agreement, subject to the Children Act 1989. The local authority has a statutory duty to those aged 0-18 years and up to 21 years as care leavers or 24 years if they are in full time education.
- 1.2 The role of the local authority as a corporate parent is to achieve good parenting for children looked after and, in broad terms, the whole Council is expected to do what any good parent would do. This includes promoting our children's educational aspirations, economic prospects, ensuring their health, safety and well-being, supporting their culture and celebrating their achievements in life.

This includes:

- **Accepting responsibility for children who are in the care of the council**
 - **Making their needs a priority, and**
 - **Seeking the best possible outcomes for children in care, as any good parent would want for their own children.**
- 1.3 The overall aim of this strategy is to improve the life chances of our looked after children through the development of a joint approach to the delivery of services working with key partners from other agencies in order to continuously improve the outcomes of children looked after in line with their peers.
 - 1.4 The purpose of this strategy is to outline a council-wide vision of our role as corporate parents and to ensure that we are all, supported by our partners, working towards a common goal and shared priorities for our looked after children and young people.
 - 1.5 The aspirations and objectives outlined within this strategy are by no means exhaustive and will be contributed to over time. As other council groups and partners sign up, other aspirations and offers will be added.

2. The Rutland context

2.1. Looked After Children Q4 data

- There were 34 looked after children at 31 March 2014. In order for a child to become 'looked after' there is a rigorous scrutiny of the circumstances to ensure that accommodation within the local authority is the only possible option.

- Of the children in care at 31st March 2014, 7 (20%) were from minority ethnic groups compared to 5.7% of the Rutland population recorded in the 2011 Census. (This % includes all ethnic groups other than White British) This is as a result of 5 unaccompanied asylum seekers entering our care in November and December
- The largest age groups of children in care at 31st March 2014 were age 0 to 4, 10 to 15 and 16+ with 9 in each age group.
- Of the 34 in care at 31st March 2014, one of the children had experienced 3 or more placements (PI 62). This compares to 3.2% reported for 2012/13
- Of the children in care for at least four weeks at the end September, all (100%) had received statutory reviews within timescale (PI 66).
- All review child protection conferences continue to be held within timescale as are Looked After Children Reviews. We continue to achieve stability and permanence and all looked after children who left care this year are in stable and suitable accommodation that meets their needs and are in further education, work or training.

3. The Wider Context

The Statutory and Legislative Framework

- 3.1 **Children Act 1989** is the primary legislation setting out local authority responsibility to children 'in need', including looked after children. Section 22 imposes a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of each child they look after. The **Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000** extended the responsibility of the local authority to young people leaving care, requiring them to plan the young person's transition to adulthood and provide ongoing advice and assistance until at least the age of 21.

The **Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations and Guidance** -clarify the expectations of care planning and review for looked after children and strengthen the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to challenge when identified needs are not being met. The manager of the service is required to prepare an annual report that should be made available to corporate parents.

The **Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transitions to Adulthood for Care Leavers** gives details of how care-leavers should be provided with comprehensive personal support so that they achieve their potential as they make their transition to adulthood. It includes the need for care-leavers to be living in suitable accommodation and receiving support to continue in education or training and to find employment.

- 3.2 The **Adoption and Children Act 2002** required all local authorities to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to review the care plans of looked

after children, and the Act introduced Special Guardianship orders that provide permanence for children but are alternatives to adoption.

- 3.3 Local authorities have been entitled to expect other agencies to assist them in discharging their functions since the implementation of the Children Act 1989 (Section 27) but this was not a statutory responsibility until the **Children Act 2004**. This Act introduced a duty on named agencies both to cooperate with the local authority (Section 10) and to ensure that they take account of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in fulfilling their own functions (Section 11).

It also made provision for local authority areas to set up Children's Trusts, bringing together relevant agencies, and to develop a Children and Young People's Plan. These are not mandatory but can provide a mechanism for bringing relevant agencies and plans together so that children's needs are not lost.

- 3.4 The **Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007** placed a duty on local authorities and primary care trusts to undertake a joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) of their local population.
- 3.5 The **Children and Young Persons Act 2008** requires local authorities to take steps to secure sufficient suitable accommodation for looked after children within their area that meets their needs.

It also strengthens the care planning process and the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer in monitoring the plan, and children's health and education plans are essential components of this.

- 3.6 The **Health and Social Care Act 2012** has abolished primary care trusts and transferred responsibility for commissioning local health services, apart from primary care, to a Clinical Commissioning Group consisting of GP consortia. Primary care and specialist services, commissioned by the NHS Commissioning Board, who are also responsible for holding the Clinical Commissioning Groups to account. The Act also established Health and Well-being Boards, led by the Director of Public Health within the local authority, to improve the health and well-being of the local population and reduce health inequalities. Section 12 created a new duty for local authorities to take steps to improve the health of people in their area.
- 3.7 The **Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012** has introduced a single remand order for children and young people under the age of 18 who are refused bail, which will mean that they become looked after children for the duration of the remand, and may mean that they are entitled to leaving care services.
- 3.8 **Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and Well-being of Looked After Children** - placed the contribution of NHS agencies towards meeting the needs of looked after children on a statutory footing for the first time. The role of the PCT was to analyse the health needs of looked after children, plan and commission services, and monitor and review their effectiveness. Strategic Health Authorities were expected to monitor the performance of

PCTs and to play a developmental and supportive role. Although PCTs have been replaced by Clinical Commissioning Groups, the government's 'mandate' to the NHS Commissioning Board for 2013–20153 says: *We expect to see the NHS, working together with schools and children's social services, supporting and safeguarding vulnerable, looked-after and adopted children, through a more joined-up approach to addressing their needs.*

- 3.9 **Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities** - clarified the duty to actively support looked after children's education. Measures include the priority that must be given to looked after children in terms of school admission, restriction on the use of school exclusion and the introduction of personal education allowances to purchase tailored support.
- 3.10 **Statutory Guidance: Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children** - requires local authorities to develop a plan to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area and which meets their needs. They can only do this if they work in partnership with other agencies as the requirement is not just about accommodation and placements but also securing a 'diverse range of universal, targeted and specialist services working together to meet children's needs' and applies not only to looked after children but also those on the edge of care and at risk of custody.
- 3.11 **Statutory Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services.** These roles are statutory and cover both the social care and education services of the local authority. These individuals should provide strong leadership and ensure that there is a clear line of accountability for children's well-being. They have particular responsibility for vulnerable groups of children, including those for whom they are corporate parents. The Lead Member should provide *political* leadership whilst the Director should provide *professional* leadership.
- 3.12 **The Equality Act 2010** places an additional responsibility on public organisations to consider the needs of Protected Characteristics (*age, disability, sex, ethnicity, religion, and belief etc*) and the effect of changes on them. This legislation also asks public organisations to support communities to get along better and understand each other. Both requirements are valid for adults and children.

The Inspection Framework

- 3.13 The new Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers was published in September 2013 and came into force from November 2013. More detailed information about the inspection framework can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

4. Rutland's Corporate Parenting Pledge

There is an expectation that councils have a pledge in relation to its looked after children and care leavers which sets out their commitments.

Rutland County Council has a pledge in place developed by the SUSO (Speak Up Speak Out) group—known as the child in care council in other local authorities. Key aspects of the pledge form part of the documentation provided to the children in care when they become looked after and set out the entitlements of looked after children and care leavers.

The pledge has recently been updated and is currently being refreshed by SUSO to make them more attractive.

To make the pledge meaningful it needs the sign up of senior leaders and the development of a Corporate Parenting Board approach will ensure that there is a corporate awareness of the pledge and that the board understands its role in relation to the pledge.

The Pledge

4.1. **Biological Family**

We promise to:

- *Support regular contact with all your family members wherever possible.*
- *To appreciate and be sensitive to your emotional connections to your family.*
- *Always try to reunite you with your family if safe and healthy and if you wishes to do so.*
- *To assist in rebuilding family relationships where and whenever possible.*
- *When appropriate share information with you about the reasons why you left your family*

4.2. **Foster Family**

We promise to:

- *Match you appropriately to a family which suits your needs.*
- *Ensure your family are welcoming at all times, and encourage them to include you in all aspects of family life.*
- *Carry out regular checks on you and your family.*
- *Support you in rebuilding the relationships with your family if needed.*
- *Make sure you feel loved and part of your family.*
- *Ensure that families have realistic expectations of you.*
- *Allow you to meet your foster family before moving in wherever possible.*
- *Make sure that all foster carers have enough training and support to care for you. This should include things like helping them find jobs, being healthy and always there for the young person.*

- *Understand your need for reassurance regarding security of your placement.*
- *Make sure your foster family know about any health issues you may have.*

4.3. Health and Wellbeing.

We promise to:

- *Respect your right to confidentiality in relation to health. (In the same way all young people have a right to confidentiality)*
- *Provide you with relevant checks connected to your physical, emotion, mental and sexual health.*
- *Listen to your thoughts and views about your health.*
- *Ensure you have accurate information about Healthy Eating, Exercise, Smoking, Drinking, Drugs and Sexual Health to support you in making informed health choices.*
- *Deal with any health issue you may have quickly and effectively.*
- *Allow you the choice to see a health practitioner without an adult (age 13yrs+)*
- *Recognise that young people with SEN may need additional specialist support and provide it.*

4.4. Home

We promise to:

- *Make sure you live in a stable, friendly, warm and comfortable environment. Where you can stay until the end of your time in care.*
- *Try to meet your individual needs within your home.*
- *Ensure you have suitable amounts of privacy within the home. (Phone calls, diary etc.).*
- *Ensure you have a bedroom where you are allowed to have alone time.*
- *Support you to feel part of your community.*

4.5. Education

We Promise to:

- *Make sure you are in a good school/college that offers high quality education and suits your need.*
- *Listen to your thoughts, views and choices about your education and respond accordingly.*
- *Make sure you have an input into your Personal Education Plan and understand it.*
- *Try our hardest not to arrange non education related meetings to take place in school or school time.*
- *Make sure you have a designated teacher in school who understands your situation.*
- *Provide you with extra tuition for any subject if you are falling behind others in your year.*
- *Celebrate your successes/achievements and acknowledge them.*

- *Monitor your progress and make sure you are achieving your full potential.*
- *Support you in your transition between school - College – Employment – University.*
- *Ensure you are provided with the uniform and equipment you need for school/college.*
- *Support you to do extracurricular activities.*
- *Make sure you have had independent careers advice.*

4.6. Future

- *Follow the Care Leaver's Charter when you are looking to leave care.*
- *Understand that stability is key to helping you visualise and plan for the future.*
- *Support you in mapping our own future.*
- *Offer you guidance about your future but accept your right to choose.*

5. Responsibilities and Objectives of Corporate Parents in Rutland

- 5.1. All councillors and council officers share corporate parenting responsibility and cannot abdicate this responsibility in favour of those they see as being more central.
- 5.2. The Council, led by the Cabinet Member for Children, the Chief Executive and the Director have a key role in ensuring that its role as a corporate parent is fulfilled in a way that builds the trust and confidence of the children and young people in its care.

We believe that **children looked after have the right to:**

- Be heard and have their views acted upon
- Feel safe and be healthy
- Help and support through to their adult life
- High quality placements that meet their needs
- Well trained and skilled staff and carers
- Stay in touch with people who are important to them
- Timely decisions, robust plans and regular reviews
- Access to high quality education, health, sport, leisure, and cultural activities
- Have their achievements recognised and rewarded.

- 5.3. We will ensure that Corporate Parents all ask, "Would this be good enough for my child?"

Corporate Parenting Objectives

- 5.4. The specific objective of this strategy is to ensure that the corporate parenting responsibilities for all councillors and council employees are clearly outlined, in order that:

- Councillors have a clear understanding and awareness of the issues for looked after children in their authority so that they can ensure that their responsibilities as corporate parents are reflected in all aspects of the work of the Council;
- All service departments are aware of the corporate parenting agenda, and have mechanisms in place to continually monitor and review the means by which their services contribute to positive outcomes for looked after children.
- Policies and practices promote access to services for looked after children and their carers.
- The corporate parenting commitment is realised through a quality of care and range of opportunities that lead to measurable improvement in the life chances of looked after children - enabling them to succeed in line with their peers.
- Communication between Councillors and looked after children is facilitated to achieve participation and inclusion, so that children and young people have a say in how decisions are made about the services that affect them, and that they have an opportunity to influence those decisions;
- Executive members are supported by officers to promote partnership working as a pre-requisite of delivering effective services to looked after children, and to ensure that the joint planning and commissioning framework continues to deliver to this agenda;
- The Council provides effective scrutiny of corporate parenting duties.

In addition the council will ensure that children looked after and care leavers will;

- Remain within their locality wherever possible
- Wherever possible have contact with their family
- Be listened to and have their views respected
- Have access to the services and activities they need, when they need them
- Be treated as individuals
- Not be discriminated against
- Know that everybody in the council is working for them to meet their needs
- Have our support and care for as long as it takes
- Be equipped with appropriate aids to education.

5.5. We will support children looked after by offering or facilitating:

- Priority housing for care leavers
- ICT support for care leavers and foster carers
- Free leisure passes

- Mentoring services to support young people

5.6. Our priorities include:

- Understanding the individual nature of our children looked after in order to provide appropriately for them, recognise and support them in their cultural, religious, and personal development, and proactively work to address any issues they may face.
- Ensuring they have safe, stable placements with carers best able to meet their needs.
- Ensuring that they are involved in decisions about their lives and in the development of services provided for them.
- Ensuring where necessary they have access to additional services which will improve their life chances and enable a successful transition to adulthood.
- Ensuring every councillor and officer of the council understands their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- Improving educational and health outcomes

6. Rutland Corporate Parenting Board

6.1. The Corporate Parenting Board, which will be established in 2014, promotes, supports and monitors all corporate parenting activity of the council. It is proposed that the Board is established on a formal constitutional basis to reflect its key role representing the wider corporate parenting responsibilities of elected members and officers. The Board should have formal accountabilities to Full Council, the Cabinet, and the Children's Scrutiny Panel. It also has important relationships with partnerships such as the Children's Trust Board and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB). The views of Rutland Children In Care Council (SUSO) and of those people engaged in caring for our children looked after will also be made available to the Board. The terms of reference of the Board are set out in Appendix One.

6.2. Specifically the Board will:

- Ensure that the commitments outlined in Rutland's Corporate Parenting Pledge are delivered.
- Oversee the implementation of this strategy and bring forward any amendments considered necessary to the Cabinet for decision;
- Monitor and scrutinise the delivery of good, safe, high quality services through quality assurance and performance management frameworks in relation to outcomes achieved by children and young people in care. This includes holding the decision makers, including partners, to account for delivery in order for the Board to fulfil its reporting responsibilities detailed in 6.1 above.

- 6.3.** Individual Board members must undertake the required training to take on the role, be prepared for their task, and be clear about their responsibilities including any authority they carry.

The relationship of the Corporate Parenting Board to other boards, the Scrutiny Committee, and partnership arrangements, must be clear. The Corporate Parenting Board must have access to robust qualitative and quantitative management information in order to effectively monitor performance against outcomes and track delivery of the Pledge commitments.

The Board will, therefore, receive regular reports on a range of local and national performance indicators in relation to children in care, for example health, education, participation and inspection outcomes.

The involvement of young people on the Board will be essential to inform current and future priorities and decisions relating to children looked after. The voice of younger children looked after will be represented at the Board through the Children in Care Council members. This group is inclusive of children and young people with disabilities.

6.4. Virtual Headteacher for Children

The Children & Families Bill 2013 requires every Local Authority to have a 'virtual school head' to champion the education of children in the authority's care, as if they all attended the same school

- Ensure cohesive educational entitlement and effective educational provision for all cared for children;
- Ensure that cared for children achieve their full potential
- Be responsible for the vision and leadership of the Local Authority's approach to the education of children looked after and consult/share appropriately with all stakeholders;
- Contribute to the safeguarding and welfare of children looked after;
- Improve attendance levels of children looked after and lower the number of days lost through exclusions;
- Improve the quality of/access to educational data and management information systems for data for children looked after;
- Champion the educational needs of children looked after across the local authority area and those placed out of the authority to raise expectations and aspirations, including post 16.

The Virtual Head will work closely with social workers, schools, settings and services to raise their awareness of the importance of education for cared for children and ensure that they treat education as a high priority.

The VHT will provide an annual report to the board setting out challenges and achievements in relation to looked after children.

6.5. Measures of success

If Rutland is successful in achieving its vision, children and young people who are looked after can expect to see improvements in the following:

- The **voices of children looked after** will be heard and will influence practice and policy.
- **Greater stability of placements** - children and young people will be well matched and supported in their placements.
- **Educational achievement** – children will reach their potential and the gap in achievement between children looked after and their peers will be narrowed.
- **Health of children looked after** – health assessments and positively responding to their needs will improve their physical, emotional, and mental health.
- **Safeguarding** – staff who are appointed to care for children and young people will be safely recruited, trained, supervised, and managed.
- **Services will work together and communicate effectively** to meet and prioritise the needs of children and young people who are looked after
- **Positive activities** – children looked after will be supported in their emotional well-being, self-esteem and confidence through engaging in leisure activities, volunteering and other activities.
- **Transition to adult services** – children and young people will be supported into adulthood.
- **Access to employment and training opportunities** will ensure that children and young people who are looked after achieve economic well-being.
- **High and realistic aspirations** of children and young people who are looked after.

6.6. Monitoring and evaluation

This strategy will be monitored and evaluated in the following ways:

- **Listening to children and young people who are looked after** will be an intrinsic part of Rutland and the boards monitoring and evaluation of this strategy

- The **effective use of local data** will aid us in identifying areas for improvement and the extent to which national and local indicators around children looked after are being met
- **Internal audit** of our services and their effectiveness.
- **External evaluation** of effectiveness in delivering this strategy is essential if the local authority wants to ensure it delivers continuous improvement. Ofsted's role, as a regulator for services and as the inspectorate for local authority children's services, is vital in terms of monitoring the effectiveness of policy and practice. We will also seek peer review and challenge from our regional colleagues.
- **Feedback** from partners, agencies, parents, carers and children and young people about our services.

6.7. Arrangements for Review of this Strategy

This strategy will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it is in line with legislation, guidance and good practice around children looked after. As a minimum, the Corporate Parenting Board will review this annually. The Board will recommend any changes considered necessary to the strategy to the Cabinet for approval and to Full Council to be endorsed.

Appendix 1 – Corporate Parenting Board Terms of Reference

Role and Responsibilities:

It is the role of the Corporate Parenting Board to set the priorities for children in care and to monitor and scrutinise service delivery. It will also:

- Ensure that the commitments outlined in the Pledge for Children in Care are delivered.
- Oversee the implementation of this Strategy with delegated responsibilities to Heads of Service or Senior Managers within all Departments and partner agencies.
- Monitor the delivery of good, safe, high quality services through quality assurance and performance management frameworks in relation to all five outcomes.

Requirements

- The leadership and governance of the Corporate Parenting Board must be clear in relation to the Board's power to deploy resources and hold officers to account.
- Individual board members must be trained and prepared for their task, and be clear about the authority they carry.
- The relationship of the Corporate Parenting Board to other Boards, partnership arrangements, and scrutiny committees must be clear.
- The Corporate Parenting Board must have access to robust qualitative and quantitative management information in order to effectively monitor performance against outcomes and track delivery of Pledge commitments.
- The Board will, therefore, receive bi-annual reports on a range of local and national performance indicators in relation to children in care e.g. health, education, participation and inspection outcomes.

Board Membership

The Corporate Parenting Board will be chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People, and will meet twice a year. Membership will also consist of the elected member who is the looked after children "champion" as well as key partners. Looked after children will attend with assistance from the CiC council. The meeting will also require attendance of the relevant SMT members to reflect the three Directorates.

The involvement of young people on the Board will be essential to inform current and future priorities and decisions relating to children in care.

We, the Council, require a whole authority and partner agency commitment to our children and young people in care, which is reflected in a holistic, integrated and cross-cutting service delivery approach. This is essential if our children in care are to achieve their full potential in all aspects of their lives.

Purpose of the Board:

To oversee the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy with delegated responsibilities to heads of service or senior managers within all departments and partner agencies.

Elected Members Membership:

Chair: Lead Member Children and Young People

Elected Member with responsibility as “champion” for looked after children.

Service User Membership:

Looked After Children, Young People and Care Leavers (SUSO), supported by the Senior Youth & Community Development Officer

Operational group:

The Board will be supported by an operational group chaired by the Head of Service (Vulnerable Children). Membership of this group will include

- Team Manager with responsibility for Looked After Children
- Team Manager Fostering and Adoption
- Virtual Head Teacher
- Foster Carer representative
- Health rep - LAC Named Nurse
- School Governor Representative
- Representatives from Places and Resources Directorates
- Independent Providers: to be determined
- Voluntary Sector: to be determined
- Leicestershire CC Adoption Service Manager
- CAFCASS representative: to be determined

Terms of Reference:

The Corporate Parenting Board will work to a yearly work programme within its terms of reference, which are as follows:

- Provide a forum for Children in Care to influence policy, service developments, practice, etc so that there is continuous improvement.
- Take a strategic overview of Rutland County Council’s and partner agencies’ responsibilities towards Children in Care.
- Ensure there are good joint working arrangements between Council Departments, with partner agencies and hold them to account for good high quality service delivery.
- Ensure that relevant new initiatives, plans, policies, and service developments are presented to the Board for consultation.

- Monitor the performance of all the key stakeholders by receiving annual progress reports in relation to the 5 Outcomes, including for Care Leavers.
- Receive annual reports from the Adoption and Fostering Services in relation to recruitment and retention of carers, placement stability and the 4 annual IRO report.

Frequency of meetings: Twice a year (September and March)

Children Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet:

The Panel and Cabinet will receive annual reports and other reports as required.

Relationship with Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children's Board:

Reporting relationship only. Should have the yearly work programme of the Corporate Parenting Board and an annual report for information only.

Relationship with Children's Trust Board:

Reporting relationship only. The Corporate Parenting Board will provide annual reports to the Children's Trust Board. The reports will be for information only to update progress and improvements made in the key outcome areas for looked after children and young people

Training Needs:

All Board members should attend a training session to include context and purpose of the Board, roles and responsibilities. Consideration should be given as to whether an external facilitator should be used for an initial 'forming' session for the Board members separate from this training or whether one session could be delivered to achieve the purpose of promoting communication and engagement as well as imparting information.

Agenda for first meeting:

Membership

Terms of Reference

Report from Children in Care Council - SUSO

Executive summary of IRO report

Priority setting (following on from reports)

Reporting/work plan for annual cycle

Suggest annual reports to include report from health/Fostering/Adoption service/IRO

LAC performance data

Children placed outside the area

