

# The Oxfordshire Pledge to its Children in Care & Care Leavers



## By the Children in Care Council & Corporate Parenting Panel

This pledge highlights what Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and the Children in Care Council (CiCC) will do for its children who are looked after to help continuously improve the care system for all. So, children and young people (CYP) are protected, safe, happy, settled and moving forward in their lives. This Pledge will be reviewed annually, running alongside the Leaving Care Charter and Foster Care Charter and issues discussed at CiCC and Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) meetings.

### **What is a Corporate Parent?**

If a CYP is looked after by OCC, or a care-leaver who OCC are still responsible for, then OCC is known as a “**Corporate Parent**”. Corporate Parents are expected to do the very best they can to act in the CYP’s best interests. If they don’t, CYP can challenge them. Corporate parents are also teachers, housing officers, foster-carers, doctors, health visitors - all the people who play a part in looking after CYP.

### **Who are the Children in Care Council (CiCC)**

The CiCC is a group of CYP who are, or have been, in care they help to make sure services are doing the best they can for all CYP in care and care leavers. The CiCC has elected Chairs and Ambassadors who, along with members, are dedicated to ensuring this Pledge is acted upon.

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## **At home - *When finding a home...***

- Involve CYP in the whole process and consider views, wishes, needs, age, background, ethnicity, culture, disability and try and provide choice of home
- Give CYP information about the family home, before they move in, and introduce CYP to carers beforehand, if possible
- If the CYP is out of county we will keep in touch as much as possible to ensure we know they are safe and well and find out if there are any problems
- Ensure foster cares are consistent and fair with rules and guidelines
- Try not to move CYP around, especially during exams and times of stress
- Support families to stay together and get back together
- Do life story work with CYP
- Involve CYP in the recruitment and training of carers
- Provide CYP with an introduction pack when they enter care
- Recognise that CYP may need to take a step back and start all over again
- Not judge CYP for their mistakes
- Help CYP build relationships in school and the local area
- Help CYP stay in contact with their family and friends, if and where appropriate. If there are reasons they can't see them, we will say why and be fair and clear.

## **When settled into a home...**

- Ensure someone goes through the short and long term 'plan' so everyone understands what is happening
- Provide outreach support, if needed and necessary
- Provide residential and breaks from home, if needed and necessary
- Be proactive with other agencies to help CYP sustain their home
- Involve CYP in activities/holidays with carers, where possible, so they feel like part of the family
- Acknowledge that CYP like their privacy and own space and try to accommodate this
- Resolve conflict and arguments quickly and fairly and signpost to an advocate if it can't be resolved amicably
- Ensure openness and fairness in providing pocket money and help with budgeting
- Give good reason if personal possessions are taken away, for example phones, personal items, etc and state if they can be given back and when.

## **Leaving the home...**

- Help CYP to think about the home choices available and find accommodation that is right for them
- Ensure agreements and boundaries are understood before they move into a new home and help if things go wrong
- Do everything we can to ensure CYP are happy and feel safe when moving into independent living  
Give CYP good preparation and planning to live independently after 18, and provide good information, advice and support; and good advice and help with budgeting, debts and life skills
- Help access adult services if needed
- Provide contact names and details in case anything goes wrong
- Give young people the space and chance to live independently to learn from mistakes.
- Ensure young people can cook, clean, have good personal hygiene and can look after themselves.

## **At school**

- Ensure CYP know who their designated teacher is and they are introduced.
- Ensure the designated teacher and all staff are aware of confidentiality issues, and handle any situation in the classroom and school sensitively
- Help develop links with the Virtual School
- Ensure the pupil premium is spent on the CYP to their benefit
- Ensure CYP stay in the same school, if they have to move home
- Make sure CYP people have the correct equipment to study and learn
- Take an active interest in education, attend parents evenings, sports days, etc
- Help CYP be active players in their education plan
- Help with homework
- Provide a range of learning opportunities and help CYP choose their GCSE options and career path
- Encourage CYP to achieve their dreams and aspirations; celebrate their achievements and give encouragement and support if they don't succeed
- Ensure CYP have access to computers, if needed.

## **At college, work placements and apprenticeships**

- Ensure CYP know who is there to help and support them
- Ensure staff are aware of confidentiality issues and respond sensitively to any issues
- Provide learning mentors and speak to tutors/employers if a CYP is struggling and needs help and support, with their consent
- Ensure CYP have access to computers, if needed.
- Give good advice and help with budgeting, debts and life skills
- Provide support if it all goes wrong and stay with the CYP until they are more settled

## **At work**

- Develop good practical opportunities for young people entering employment, such as apprenticeship, taster sessions, etc
- Ensure there is practical support and mentors when necessary
- Give good advice and help with budgeting, debts and life skills
- Provide advice and support, or signpost, so young people can update their CV/Skills for employability
- Never give up on a young person until they are settled and sorted

## **Leisure, hobbies and interest**

- Encourage CYP to take up hobbies or leisure activities
- Provide information on local activities and events
- Support access to sport and leisure facilities, financial, travel or other and any funding available to undertake them
- Take an active interest in their hobbies and interests and celebrate achievements
- Understand CYP may change their minds and support them through
- Help CYP purchase or find funding for equipment and memberships at leisure centres, etc so they stay fit, healthy and alert

## **Staying safe and protected**

- Ensure CYP take 'safe' risks and don't put themselves into any compromising positions. If a CYP takes a risk, and regret it, talk to them and make sure they understand the consequences and know how to manage such situations differently and get further help if they need it.
- Ensure CYP are safe on line and any concerns are acted upon swiftly and they don't divulge their personal information on line and they know who they are 'talking to' and 'trust' at all times.

## **Health and well being**

- Ensure CYP have access to an NHS dentist
- Provide contact details for a named nurse or doctor
- Provide access to information on all health issues
- Make sure CYP have regular dental and health check-ups
- Signpost a CYP to organisations who can help with their health and wellbeing
- Do timely signing of documents, if needed, for medical support and advice
- Ensure CYP keep the same doctors, if they change homes, and have developed good relationships with them
- Ensure someone is there if CYP are ill or in hospital
- Ensure someone is listening to CYP if they saying they are unwell, notice the signs and act swiftly
- Encourage CYP not to smoke, take drugs or drink alcohol excessively. If they do, talk to them and make sure they understood the consequences and are supported to change their behaviour and receive appropriate support if necessary.

## **In the community**

- Make sure CYP have safe transport
- Make sure CYP respect their communities and become active citizens
- Ensure CYP are safe in the community at all times and 'we' know where they are going and times of return
- Ensure CYP know where to go for help and support if in danger
- Ensure if 'we' feel CYP are not safe, or in danger, we take prompt action in the best interest of the CYP.

## **Having a say**

- Help CYP understand their rights, responsibilities and entitlements and never give up on them, however and whatever they do
- Fully involve CYP in plans made for their future
- Listen to CYP and take them seriously
- Actively involve CYP in their reviews and ensure they meet IRO's before reviews and after, if necessary
- Provide CYP access to legal advice, if needed
- Provide CYP with an independent visitor and/or advocate, if needed
- Offer CYP the chance to air their views and opinions in a number of creative ways, such as through The Children in Care Council, Sounding Boards, Oxfordshire Youth Parliament, UK Youth Parliament, regular reviews, surveys, newsletters, social media ([www.oxme.info/care](http://www.oxme.info/care)) the 'info card', forums and events
- Help create positive images for CYP in care to break stigma in society and media
- Take time to listen, respect and understand points of view, thoughts and feelings and ensure they are at the heart of all decision making processes and show how these have been taken into account
- Provide easy access to complaints, compliments and know how to raise concerns, with support, if needed
- Provide feedback on any consultations and reviews with clear outcomes and actions
- Ensure, if not a member of the CiCC, views and opinions are still heard and taken seriously
- Provide good open communication and information
- Ensure CYP are involved in National Forums, so they feed into the national agenda and feed back into the Oxfordshire agenda
- If CYP are nervous about airing their views to their workers, carers or in forums, they are signposted to 'VIVA' who have dedicated volunteer advocates who will listen to them and make sure that others listen to them and take them seriously.