

# Luton Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy

“Children and Young People at the heart of everything we do”

### *Our vision:*

“Making Luton a child-friendly town, where our children and young people grow up feeling happy, healthy and secure, with a voice that matters and the opportunities they need to thrive.”



Document Summary	
Version:	V1.04
Date Created:	2/7/2021
Owner:	Teresa Gallagher
Approved by	Date and Version:
Corporate Parenting Board:	15/09/2021
Executive:	25/04/2022

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## **Foreword**

At Luton Council, there is a vision for “making Luton a child-friendly town, where our children and young people grow up feeling happy, healthy and secure, with a voice that matters and the opportunities they need to thrive. We have a vision of a town where nobody should live in poverty by 2040.

Luton is one of the youngest towns in the country, meaning that children and young people in the town will be crucial in realising our vision. It is therefore essential that we provide our young people with the best start in life, enabling them to reach their full potential. To do so, we must secure the following objectives:

- 1. All of our children and young people will be able to access services that keep them safe and secure**
- 2. Reduced health inequalities for all our children and young people**
- 3. Children and young people with SEND will have the same opportunities as non-disabled children and young people**
- 4. Excellent educational outcomes and increased aspiration and achievement for our children and young people**
- 5. Our young people will have a voice that is heard and that matters**

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy is pivotal in creating a child friendly town. Care experienced children and young people are amongst the most vulnerable in our town, so providing them with the best possible start in life must be a priority for Luton Council. Realising our responsibilities as corporate parents is essential in delivering positive outcomes for Care experienced children and young people. That is why our Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines what these are, who must be involved and how they will be fulfilled.

For us, corporate parenting is about ensuring all professionals supporting a child fully realise their responsibilities towards care experienced children and young people within Luton, acting to improve their life chances and realise their potential. We therefore need to shift our organisation’s culture and raise the profile of corporate parenting responsibilities within both Luton Council and partners that we work with. Indeed, anybody who works with a child or young person in the care of Luton Council possesses corporate parenting responsibilities, ranging from social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, team managers and beyond.

We will work in partnership with organisations in the public, private and voluntary sector to support our care-experienced children and young people, as Luton Council cannot achieve its ambition for a child friendly town alone. Only through everyone realising their responsibilities and collaborating together can we ensure that children and young people have the best possible start in life, laying the foundations for a prosperous Luton, and ensure that the support that we provide for our care experienced children ensures that they can achieve their best potential and have a happy safe life.

# **Introduction**

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy describes Luton Council's approach towards delivering the Corporate Parenting Principle; to improve the lives of care experienced children and young people.

This document sets out strategic aims and objectives for care experienced children and young people, in relation to the following four Corporate Parenting Principles:

- 1. Keeping children young people safe and secure**
- 2. Improving children and young people's health and well-being**
- 3. Building strong and supportive families**
- 4. Raising the aspirations of children and young people to raise their attainment and achievement.**

The strategy outlines our vision and objectives and sets out how we intend to achieve our goals. We also outline the context in which this strategy sits, and the governance structure in place to ensure that our vision is achieved.

This strategy is part of a broad range of activity that supports our shared aim to improve provision for care experienced children and young people including:

- A Pledge to children in care and care leavers which outlines our commitments to them and the support they can expect from us
- A local offer for care leavers, informed by the views of our children and young people
- A Corporate Parenting Panel, chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People
- An active Young Peoples Panel to ensure that the voices of young people remain central to our work ( Children in Care Council )
- The Virtual School, which works with schools, colleges, training providers, education settings and children's social care to improve educational outcomes for children in care and care leavers
- A Placement Sufficiency Plan, that sets out how we will deliver the range and number of high quality placements needed by children in care and care leavers
- A joint Social Care and Housing strategy that focuses on plans to prevent homelessness and support delivery of the Corporate Strategy
- A commitment to ensuring that corporate parenting responsibilities are embedded in all applicable policies, strategies and commissioning arrangements.
- The Council's overarching Corporate Strategy 2018-23. In particular, the themes of 'Wellbeing' and 'Empowering and Caring', as well as a key commitment to be "great corporate parents and safeguard children and vulnerable adults, protecting them from exploitation or harm"

## Our approach



Luton Council is committed to being an effective, caring, and ambitious corporate parent. Children and young people are at the heart of everything we do. In Luton we all believe that every child should have the opportunity to reach their full potential and that children are best supported to grow and achieve within their own families.

Therefore, our approach to Corporate Parenting will align with Luton's Practice Framework. Luton has adopted a strength/relationship based approach as its practice framework that enables discussion and reflection on what good practice looks like.

Our practice framework, and approach to corporate parenting will focus on the "4c's", which are detailed as follows:

- We will use **conversations** to build relationships with children and their families, we will actively listen to both their strengths and what they need help with. We will create the opportunity to have conversations with our professional networks to help us provide the right support at the right time.
- We will practice with respectful **curiosity** to help us understand the lived experience of children and young people who need our help. We will be curious about the families past experience. We will encourage curiosity across our professional network, helping us to build strong local relationships.
- We will practice with **courage**, not being afraid to fail and try new things supporting our children and families through change, modelling courageous conversations to challenge without blame. We will use courage to seek feedback on our practice and create a culture of safe challenge.
- Our practice will be **considerate**, respectful of diversity and difference, we will practice with care to ensure the best outcomes for our children and their families.

## Aims and objectives of Corporate Parenting

The overarching aim for Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers is:

*“To ensure that Luton’s children and young people are safeguarded and the right children come into care, at the right time and are placed in the right placement with support services to meet their assessed needs. Where possible we will strive to ensure that children can remain safely within their families to promote their identity and positive family life”*

## Our Pledge

To cement our commitment towards ensuring care experienced children and young people have a positive experience of being in care with Luton Council, we have agreed pledges and ensured that these are shared with all children taking into consideration age and needs.

### [Our Pledge to Luton’s children under 10](#)

### [Our Pledge to Luton’s 11-14 year olds](#)

### [Our Pledge to Luton’s 15-18 year olds](#)

### [Our Pledge to children and young people in Luton with disabilities](#)

## **The Legislative framework and legal duties.**

The Children Act 1989 is internationally heralded as the gold standard of childcare legislation, setting out the duties on the Local Authority. Numerous Acts have subsequently enhanced this with developments to improve the lives of our children and young people, including the principle of collective responsibility for local authorities as laid out in Children and Social Work Act 2017. The 2018 Department for Education guidance on “Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers” states that the local authority must provide each CLA with the same quality of care and opportunities to succeed as they would for their own children.

Luton Council’s Children’s Services cannot do this on its own. Therefore, it is imperative that partner organisations, such as health, education, police, housing, local businesses and voluntary organisations assist and support Luton council to fulfil its obligations.

1. Act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
2. Encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
3. Take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
4. Help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
5. Promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
6. Be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
7. Prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

In 2017 the Children and Social Work Act introduced a set of **Corporate Parenting Principles** for children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25 years old. For the first time, it enshrined our collective responsibility and duty to:

## What is Corporate Parenting?

'Corporate Parenting' is the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies to give care experienced children and young people the best start in life.

The role of corporate parent extends beyond children's social care. It is the responsibility of each elected Councillor, every member of staff and wider partner agencies to enable children in the council's care to lead happy and fulfilled lives.

Being a good corporate parent means that we should:

- accept responsibility for our children in the council's care
- make their needs a priority
- provide them with same outcomes that any good parent would want for their own children

Care experienced children and young people are amongst the most vulnerable children and young people in our town. The care needs of these children and young people in the care of Luton is of great importance and are given a high priority by the local authority, as these are children and young people have often suffered abuse and experienced trauma.

All children and young people should expect the council to be the best parent it can be and to act for them in the same way as any good parent would act for their own child. We work with Luton Young People's Panel to identify their key priorities and to develop actions that will lead to positive change for our children and young people.

This strategy document sets out our commitment to work together with all employees, members, partners, to improve outcomes for care experienced children and care leavers for whom we all have this responsibility.

# Who are our corporate parents?

Luton Council has adopted from the publication 'Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice' (National Children's Bureau 2008) three levels of understanding and responsibility, as detailed below in relation to Corporate Parenting:

## Level 1 – Those with Universal Responsibility

Who is included?

- All elected members
- All council officers
- All partner agencies, including Health, Education and Housing services

Those included in this level must have a full understanding of:

- The broad profile of the needs of CLA
- Why this group of children in our care must be looked after
- CLA's outcomes when compared with children who are not looked after
- Their duties and responsibilities for promoting the welfare of CLA and care leavers
- Our pledges to CLA and Care Leavers in Luton

## Level 2 – Those with Targeted Responsibility

Who is included?

- Elected members with designated corporate parenting responsibilities. These are members of the Corporate Parenting Board.

As well as the knowledge outlined in Level 1 responsibility, those included within level 2 must have full understanding of:

- Expectations regarding services for children in care and care leavers
- Qualitative and quantitative information about services and outcomes for children and young people and how to evaluate this information
- How they would take action, alongside other agencies, in response to a CLA's needs and improve service delivery
- How to consider children's outcomes throughout all levels of decision making in important areas of their lives

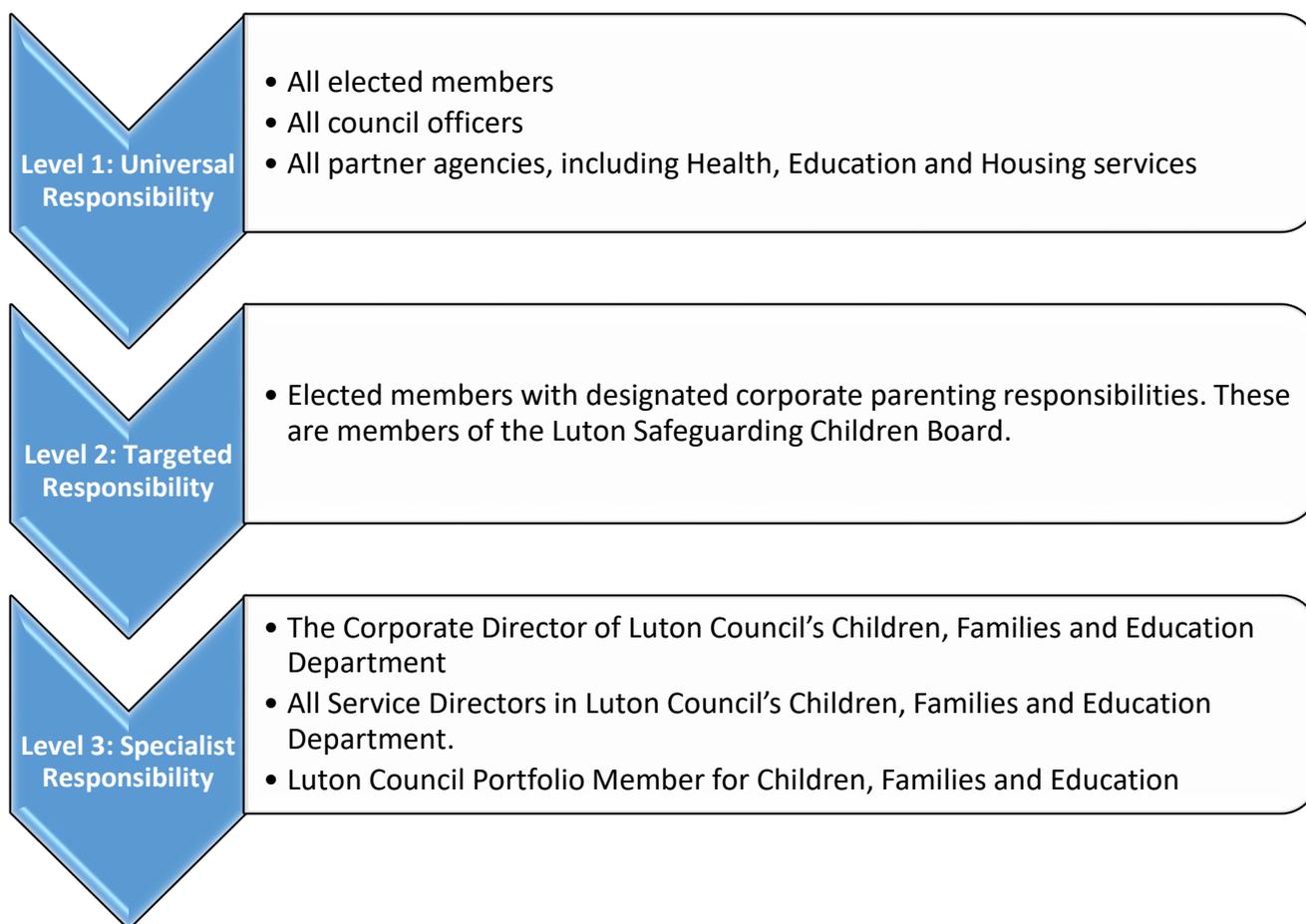
## Level 3 – Those with Specialist Responsibility

Who is included?

- The Corporate Director of Luton Council's Children, Families and Education Department
- All Service Directors in Luton Council's Children, Families and Education Department.
- Luton Council Portfolio Member for Children, Families and Education (Lead Member ) and the Portfolio holder for education and Learning
- Chief Executive of Luton borough Council

In addition to the responsibilities outlined in Levels 1 and 2, they must:

- Devise and implement our commitments as part of Luton 2020-2040 Strategic Vision and joint plans with partner agencies
- Demonstrate and enable systematic leadership, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of Care experienced children and young people.
- Possess and utilise an in-depth understanding of the needs of Luton’s care experienced children and young people to inform service improvement
- Maintain governance arrangements to implement any decisions regarding care experienced children and young people across the partnership
- Take action promptly to address and resolve any service capability gaps
- Structure Tree of Corporate Parents at Luton Council, and their level of responsibility for care experienced children and young people



## **Our Priorities for action**

1. Support for children to remain with and return to their families or people who know them best. When this is not possible, children move to a permanent family or care placement without delay.
2. Provide and commission the right mix of quality placements and move on accommodation for care leavers.
3. Improve outcomes, maximise the child's potential and celebrate their achievement. Being in care or leaving care will be an enriching experience that equips the child for a successful life.
4. Plan effectively to promote stability and permanence.
5. Involve children, families and carers to influence what we do and the way we design and develop our services.
6. Promote a positive transition to adulthood.
7. Improve health and well-being by ensuring high quality health services and information are provided to children, young people and carers.

To meet the **seven Corporate Parenting Principles set out in the 2017 the Children and Social Work Act**, our strategy towards Corporate Parenting will focus on seven priorities. Each key priority is detailed in the following sections, describing what good practice looks like:

### **Priority 1: Support for children to remain with and return to their families or people who know them best.**

Care experienced children and young people who return to their birth families should do so after a robust assessment of risk and support must be provided for their family. There is evidence nationally that indicates that children who return home are at risk of ongoing abuse and neglect if reunification is not supported by work with parents.

### **Priority 2: Provide and commission the right mix of quality placements and move on accommodation for care leavers**

The duty to commission sufficient placements for care experienced children and young people is supported by statutory guidance, which requires local authorities and their partners to:

- commission a range of placements locally, including sufficient placements to meet a range of needs

- in emergencies, put in place multi-agency support to meet the needs identified in children's care plans, involving universal services in providing additional support for CLA
- ensure social workers know about available placements and support, with carers knowing how to access additional support
- ensure services are available in the right places within the authority, based on the geographic distribution of need
- collaborate with other local authorities to ensure placements within a short travelling distance are available where necessary
- ensure adoptions are completed in a timely manner, through adopter recruitment and prompt permanence planning

### **Priority 3: Improve outcomes, maximise the child's potential and celebrate their achievement**

The local authority and its partners have a duty to act as corporate parents for care experienced children and young people. This means ensuring they have the support they need to achieve good outcomes in their health, education and transition into adulthood.

#### Care Planning

Achieving good outcomes for care experienced children and young people requires a holistic and tailored response to their needs. Good care planning involves children, carers and partner agencies, considering the needs of each individual child and young person.

#### Provision for children placed out of authority

Children placed within Luton must benefit from the multi-agency governance and management of services designed for them. It is also important that the needs of children placed outside the area are fulfilled with the highest quality support. Young people placed out of area often have highly complex needs, including experience of child sexual exploitation in some cases. Co-operation between local authorities when placing children out of area is vital, such as ensuring consistent access to health and education, responding to missing incidents and planning for independence.

#### Health

Local authorities and their partners should ensure care experienced children and young people have access to health, education and prevention, screening and immunisations, primary and secondary health services and support for emotional and mental health needs. Carers and social workers should be able to access additional support when placements are at risk of breakdown. Specialist mental health services should be available for care leavers, particularly those who do not qualify for adult mental health support.

#### Education

Care experienced children and young people need additional support to achieve the same educational outcomes as their peers. Their educational progress should be monitored both by their school and the local authority. They should have access to additional opportunities for enrichment and activities designed to raise their aspirations. They should be encouraged to consider their future ambitions and how to achieve them. School changes and exclusions should be minimised.

#### Safety

Care experienced children and young people are more likely to go missing than their peers and there is an associated risk of child sexual exploitation. Offering every child a return interview whilst using the information provided to offer help where required to analyse patterns and trends of missing children helps to protect them from child sexual exploitation. The risk of going missing, and actions to be taken when they do go missing, should be included in care plans.

## **Priority 4: Plan effectively to promote stability and permanence**

### Care Proceedings

Work to improve placement stability begins before a child enters care, exploring kinship care options and, where necessary, the speedy completion of care proceedings.

### Placement Stability

Placement stability is a vital factor in supporting better outcomes for care experienced children and young people as it promotes stable attachments to carers, providing a foundation for health and education outcomes. Children and young people who are looked after have told us that stability is important to them, and that placement changes can be a source of anxiety.

## **Priority 5: Involve children, families and carers**

CLA are experts in the quality of services provided to them, through their direct experience of services. Listening to care experienced children and young people is a vital part of corporate parenting and should be done by everyone involved in working with them, from carers and frontline staff to senior managers and elected members. It not only informs support for that child, but also provides an insight into how services can be improved and gives CLA a sense of empowerment and responsibility that increases their resilience.

## **Priority 6: Promote a positive transition to adulthood**

Supporting positive transitions into adulthood is a core responsibility for local authorities as corporate parents, requiring consideration of a wide range of support for continuing education, entering employment and living independently. Carers should support young people to gain the life skills and independence that they will need as adults, with additional support. For example, these include 'Staying Put' placements for those who are not ready to make that transition at 18 years old. Transitional points for young people in care will be enhanced by assigning them PAs to co-work their cases with Social Workers in the Looked After Teams.

Care leavers should understand their rights and the support that is available to them, both now and in the future. Having a safe place to live, near social networks, education and employment opportunities is vital for a successful transition, as is sufficient financial support to help young people achieve their ambitions through education and training. They should be able to access primary health services, their own health records and receive a swift referral to specialist services including for mental health and drug and alcohol problems.

## **Priority 7: Improve health and well-being by ensuring high quality health services and information are provided to children, young people and carers**

To deliver high quality health and well-being services, care leavers must be informed of all developments at the earliest opportunity, and be aware of the support the local authority will provide.

Care leavers will receive contact from their PAs in line with the rules for Keeping in Touch (KIT), and have work complete with the PAs to accurately and consistently record the KIT for 18 year olds and 19-21 year olds on LCS. Care leavers will also have updated pathway plans that comply with 6 monthly timescale and have work completed in ensuring PAs involve the care leavers and any key professionals in the development of their plan.

## **How will our Corporate Parenting Strategy achieve its priorities? And how would we measure impact.**

The council is working to create a thriving town that, by 2040, achieves our vision to eradicate poverty and hardship in our town. There are five strategic priorities underpinning the council's approach towards achieving such an outcome, acting as decisive conditions that must be fulfilled in order to create a town where nobody should live in poverty. These are:

1. An inclusive economy.
2. Protecting the most disadvantaged
3. A child friendly town
4. A carbon neutral town
5. A strong and empowered community

In corporate parenting, our ambition is to ensure the following is met:

**“Making Luton a child-friendly town, where our children and young people grow up feeling happy, healthy and secure, with a voice that matters and the opportunities they need to thrive.”**

Corporate parenting is about the participation of all agencies in the lives of CLA and Care Leavers to raise their profile and improve their life chances.

This strategy aims to achieve the target outcomes within this pillar as follows:

Priority	How will we make this happen?	Which corporate parent will help make this happen?	How will we know it has been successful?
<p><b>Voice of the child/young person</b></p> <p>Our young people will have a voice that is heard and empowered.</p>	<p>Support the participation team and all the key members of the corporate parenting group to develop and undertake their priorities, and represent the voice of all children and young people.</p> <p>Staff, councillors, communities and businesses involve children and young people in rebuilding our community, economy and environment after lockdown.</p> <p>We will support positive and constructive involvement with other topical issues including climate change and Black Lives Matter.</p> <p>Consultation and participation of children and young people is embedded as best practice.</p> <p>Support and educate our workforce to develop confidence and competence when working with ALL children and young people.</p> <p>Evidence involvement in training plans and training delivery, further development of peer support service.</p>	<p>Lead Member for Children and Young People (supported by foster carer representative and Participation and Mentoring Officer).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and young people report that they are listened to, supported and involved.</li> <li>• Children and young people are attending and participating in their CLA and pathway plan review meetings</li> <li>• Evidenced involvement in training plans and training delivery, further development of peer support service.</li> <li>• Evidence that the wishes and feelings of young people are considered, visible and championed in everything we do, including commissioning, procurement and policy making.</li> </ul>

Priority	How will we make this happen?	Which corporate parent will help make this happen?	How will we know it has been successful?
	Support our workforce to improve their inclusion and understanding of children and young people's wishes and feelings.		
<p><b>Access to services</b></p> <p>All of our children and young people will be able to access services that keep them safe and secure.</p>	<p>We will establish a stable workforce to recruit and retain staff. A stable workforce will ensure that children and young people in care can build trusting relationships with the staff who support them</p> <p>We will recruit enough foster carers so children in care can live locally – close to their family, friends and school.</p>	<p>DCS, AD, Head of Service, managers and social workers.</p> <p>All key partner agencies and the relevant professionals.</p> <p>Head of Corporate Parenting.</p> <p>Lead Member for Children and Young People.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A permanent, stable workforce, with social work staff who know and understand children and young people.</li> <li>• Feedback measured on what children and young people tell us.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Health</b></p> <p>Reduced health inequalities for all our CLA and care leavers.</p>	<p>Provide all children and young people with the individual social, emotional, physical and practical support they need to ensure they are prepared with skills that support their wellbeing and excellent health.</p> <p>Improve children and young people's access to health professionals, services and health information, Such information will support emotional, psychological</p>	<p>Specialist Nurse, Children in Care.</p> <p>Principal Clinical Psychologist in Child, Adolescent and Mental Health Services (CAMHS).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and young people will confidently access a variety of health services when a health need arises.</li> <li>• All health reviews will have a recorded Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and an outline action plan to support improved lifelong health.</li> <li>• Develop a mental health pathway for Children in Care and their carers to access CAMHS assessment and psychological support.</li> </ul>

Priority	How will we make this happen?	Which corporate parent will help make this happen?	How will we know it has been successful?
	and physical health directly and indirectly.		
<p><b>Special Educational Needs (SEND)</b></p> <p>Children and young people with SEND will have the same opportunities as non-disabled children and young people.</p>	<p>All early years settings and schools have a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) or inclusion manager. It is their responsibility to coordinate support for children in their setting and to liaise with other professionals to ensure children's needs are met and set out in a plan if that is required.</p> <p>A statutory assessment of education, health and care will be conducted in accordance with the Children and Families Act 2014. The co-ordinated assessment will determine whether an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan is needed.</p> <p>Referrals for children with a disability, including those who also have a statement of Special Educational Need or an EHC plan, will be conducted.</p> <p>For children, who have a disability or special educational need and</p>	<p>Schools Colleges and other higher education establishments in Luton.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SENCO or inclusion manager incorporated into all early years settings in Luton.</li> <li>• Statutory Assessments will be completed within timescales.</li> <li>• MASH and assessment teams will conduct all referrals for children with either disabilities or special educational needs, if they have not been previously allocated to a social worker.</li> </ul>

Priority	How will we make this happen?	Which corporate parent will help make this happen?	How will we know it has been successful?
	<p>who do not have an allocated social worker, the referral will be managed through the MASH and assessment teams.</p>		
<p><b>Education</b></p> <p>Excellent educational outcomes and increased aspiration and achievement for our children and young people.</p>	<p>Scrutinise progress and attainment, challenging schools to ensure target grades are achieved.</p> <p>Increase the range of opportunities for vulnerable learners post 16.</p> <p>Develop an 'Aspirations programme'.</p> <p>Work closely with schools, colleges and training providers to support the return to education and training, catching up on missed learning.</p> <p>Work with employers and employment support services to help young people to find work.</p>	<p>Virtual school head teacher.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced exclusion rates.</li> <li>• Reduced number of care experienced who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).</li> <li>• Evidence that we have increased numbers of those attending further education, including apprenticeship and university.</li> </ul>

Priority	How will we make this happen?	Which corporate parent will help make this happen?	How will we know it has been successful?
<p><b>Leisure and recreation</b></p>	<p>Develop links between other service areas of the local authority, private and voluntary sectors (such as Public Health) to join up resources across the council to help support this priority.</p> <p>Collaborate with the council's strategic partners such as leisure, Luton Theatre, higher and further education establishments to provide direct and indirect support.</p> <p>Develop a communication strategy to ensure that young people and carers are aware of opportunities that are available within the city, market towns and all communities.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official support from our strategic partners obtained.</li> <li>• Communication strategy produced and implemented.</li> </ul>