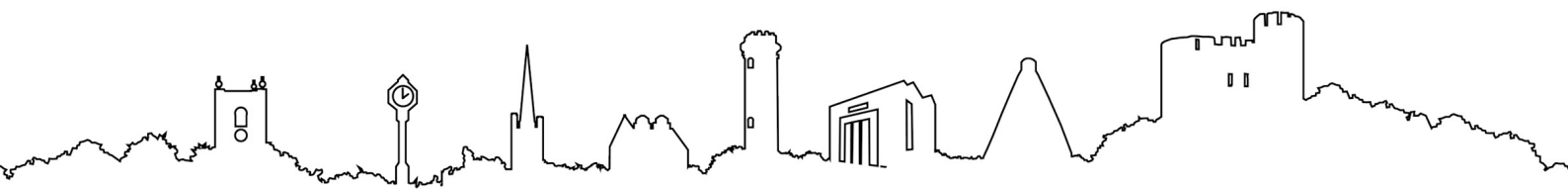


Dudley Children's Corporate Parenting Strategy

2021 – 2023



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Dear Corporate Parents,

We are children, we just happen to be in care. We don't want to be stereotyped and we don't want special treatment.

Please don't make assumptions about us.

What you need to know is we are all different and you can't put us all in one category.

We would like your help and support.

What we want for our future is help to get the education that we and for you to have high expectations for us, help us get the right housing when we need it, help us to get work experience, jobs and help us to find out what we can do. And have opportunities to access activities to meet other people.

We will know you have taken on our views if you ask questions to understand us, stay in touch with us and tell us what you are doing about our views

Care experienced young people Dudley

Dear Corporate Parents,

We are Dudley care experienced young people. We would like to be heard and valued. We want to have a voice. We are all unique in our own different ways.

We may have similar pasts, but we have different approaches to reaching our similar goal: to be successful in life.

We need to be genuinely supported by you.

We need you to care about us as individual people and to show that you care not just because you are paid to do so.

We might need second chances, which other young people would get automatically.

We are allowed to make mistakes and will need to be picked up after each by someone who cares.

We need to be praised as this builds us up.

We might need a helping hand to achieve and thrive

Care experienced young people Dudley

A message from the Mayor



I am passionate about making sure Dudley borough is full of hope and aspiration. Through our 'Child Friendly Dudley' agenda we have the highest ambitions for our children and young people. We want to create a brighter future where every child has the right to grow up in an environment where they feel safe to play, learn and grow. Central to this vision is making sure everyone can play their part in supporting Dudley's children, and making Dudley the best place to grow up in for a child in the care of this borough.

I am extremely proud of Dudley's care experienced children and young people and I am committed to do all I can to support them to benefit from the many opportunities our great borough has to offer.

We want children and young people who have experienced care to feel loved, accepted, and safe. I particularly want to thank our skilled, dedicated, and compassionate foster carers and staff for their commitment as we have navigated the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic together. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy builds on our vision for children and young people that commits us to be great corporate parents. We will build on the structures that have already been established for care experienced children and young people to be the best corporate parents we can be. This strategy underpins our commitment to champion Dudley's children and young people in care and to ensure they have every opportunity to live happy and fulfilling lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. E. Millward'.

Councillor Anne Millward

Mayor of Dudley



Introduction

Corporate Parenting is the term used in law to describe our collective responsibility to care for, love and champion our care experienced children and young people and ensure they have every opportunity to reach their full potential as they grow up in our care.

In Dudley we are aspiring to gain long-standing support from our key partners and businesses we want them to embrace an Extended Corporate Family role in supporting children. We want to continue to foster and build upon those links to make our Borough the best place for care-experienced young people to live.

This strategy is a result of conversations and a survey with children and young people, who are the experts in their experience and with their families and carers involved in their journey. This strategy is about working with children and young people in a collaborative and co-productive way as we acknowledge they have the right and responsibility to shape how services work for them. In developing this strategy, we referred to the Dudley's Voice & Influence Strategy for guidance on how to involve our children and young people.

Corporate Parenting Principles and Messages' presented at the National Care-experienced Conference.

This strategy describes our Boroughs approach to delivering on those Corporate Parenting Principles to improve the lives of the children in and leaving our care. It outlines our vision and approach, reports on some of our recent achievements and developments and sets out how we intend to achieve our goals.

We will also outline the context in which this strategy sits, and the governance structure in place to ensure that our vision is achieved. Our preferred terminology is care experienced child or young person as this is what young people have told us they prefer and encompasses children and young people at every stage of their journey.

1. Coram Bright Spot Publications (2017 - 2020), Corporate Parenting Survey to children, young people, carers, and professionals (July 2020), BCC Care Leaver Survey (May 2020), Focus groups with children in care and care leavers (September 2020)

2 Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers: Statutory guidance for local authorities February 2018, p.8

3 <https://www.careexperiencedconference.com/reports>



This strategy sits alongside legislation for care experienced children and young people which outlines our commitments to them, and the support they can expect from us.

In 2017 the Children and Social Work Act introduced a set of Corporate Parenting Principles for our care experienced children and young people up to the age of 25 that underpin everything we do and are referenced below:

- ❖ Act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of our children and young people.
- ❖ Encourage our children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- ❖ Consider the views, wishes and feelings of our children and young people
- ❖ Help our children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- ❖ Promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for our children and young people.
- ❖ Be safe, have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- ❖ Prepare our children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

We want to learn from the experiences of children and young people and have incorporated the Top 10 Messages from Care-experienced Conference 2019 into this strategy.

Promote, more love in the care system including displays of positive physical affection.

Ensure, care-experienced people are regarded and treated as individuals worthy of respect and to promote that respect wherever we can.

Ensure, that relationships are seen as central to all our policies and procedures to support care experienced children and young people

Take, clear steps to improve stability and continuity in the lived experiences of people in care.

Work, with our partners and young people to raise awareness of need and improve support for the mental health and well-being of care experienced children and young people in our local area.

Recognise, in our daily work that the impact of care experience does not end at 18 or 21 or even 25 and review our practice to remove age restrictions on support wherever we can.

Protect, promote and where necessary rebuild family and community connections and help those young people for whom we are responsible to understand their personal history.

Make, sure that young people in our care are routinely engaged, consulted, and have a real say in their own lives

Ensure, that young people in our care are properly and fully informed of their rights and offer advocacy to ensure they receive them.

Listen, to the voice of children in care and care-experienced people of all ages and always consult them about changes to services and support.

Corporate parenting

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

- ❖ A forever home at earliest stage for our children in care
- ❖ A commitment to ensuring that corporate parenting responsibilities are embedded in all applicable policies, strategies, and commissioning arrangements.
- ❖ The council's overarching Plan aims at:
 - Sustaining Services to ensure Children's Social Care delivers high quality, value for money services.
 - Growing resilient families, ensuring less children are in care
 - Building strong partnerships with statutory and voluntary sector partners to ensure safe and high-quality care for children.
 - Safeguarding in practice by having a clear, consistent, and quality model of social work that enables best outcomes for children.
- ❖ Our co-produced Pledge to care experienced children and young people and a local offer for care experienced young people.
- ❖ Dudley restorative approach - whole community approach to improving the outcomes for our children and young people in care. In the future we envisage that each child and young person in care will be supported by practitioners working restoratively.



Corporate Parenting Board

Our Corporate Parenting Board is chaired by the lead Member for Children.

There are four Working Groups of the Dudley's Corporate Parenting Board each chaired by a Councillor who sits on the Board.

These are:

Working Group for Care Experienced Young People - This group will focus on our care experienced young people aged 16 - 25 years old. It will address issues pertinent to care experienced young people and effect change to improve outcomes for this group. Areas of work will include: Further Education, Housing, Benefits Employability, Training, Skills and Apprenticeships.

Working Group for Permanence - Permanence is a priority action for Dudley. This group will focus on the quality of the care our children and young people, the suitability of placements and the speed at which they receive permanency. It will oversee the Fostering Recruitment, transforming Residential Care, ensuring policy and procedure support early permanence, ensuring the right financial support to achieve early permanence, and raising the profile of forever across the council.

Working Group for Emotional Health and Wellbeing - care experience children and young people need every investment to overcome the adversity they experienced in early childhood. We need strong support to ensure our children have the right access to Health, Emotional Wellbeing, Education & Leisure, Entitlements and Support Services. It will monitor the outcomes and ambitions for our children in care as we would our own children

Skills Working Group - This Group will gather a register of interested tradesmen to teach our care experienced young people practical skills to allow them to achieve independence. Care experienced young people will be upskilled to be able to maintain their homes to a safe and comfortable standard. It is a great opportunity to help a young person as you would your own child

Our approach

Dudley's overarching approach includes Dudley Council promise to put children and young people at the front and centre of everything it does.

The voice of children and young people in care will be at the heart of service design, delivery, and evaluation, including democratic decision-making processes.

The responsibility for ensuring that care experienced children and young people achieve good outcomes lies across the whole of Dudley Metropolitan Borough as well as with partners

Wherever safe and possible, children and young people should live with their family. We will ensure that the children in our care are only those who need to be in care.

Prevention and early intervention are a central element of our support for children and families to give them every opportunity to stay together. Where care becomes necessary, we will explore options for living with wider family and friends' networks wherever possible.

We will always strive to provide the best quality homes possible that meet Children's need and offers stability.

Children in care have the right to access the best education possible and the support they need to meet their full potential.

We will secure permanence and belonging for children. We will support and help strengthen the relationships that are important to children and help them stay connected to those that they love throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

We will champion and support young people as they leave our care and start to live independently, doing everything we can to make sure they are set up for life.



The Dudley model

As corporate parents, relationships and connection will be at the core of everything we do. We will work with children to help us get things right for them. We will always have high aspirations for our children and young people: we will see their strengths, celebrate their achievements, and create lasting happy memories.

We understand it is crucial we pay attention to the experience of trauma, and the importance of ensuring our children have good emotional support. The Dudley Restorative practice Model for will enable corporate parents to consistently adopt a trauma-informed, relationship and strength-based approach. The Dudley Model concerns paying equal attention to four key areas; children, carers staff and the environment.

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021 - 2023

Through adopting the Dudley Model Corporate Parents will:

- Seek to understand and learn about what has happened to children, not seek to identify what is wrong with them
- Prioritise relationships in every interaction
- Believe children do well if they can
- Seek to identify and build on children's strengths
- Respond, not react
- Support children to develop resilience
- Be reflective and open to learning

The Way Forward

How businesses and other partners can help care experienced children and young people achieve their potential.

As a council, we are ambitious for care experienced children and young people and we know the Borough is too. The business and voluntary sector often ask us how they can help. The Way Forward outlines five key areas where businesses and the voluntary sector can help make a difference.

1. Pledge access to your organisation's cultural, sport, leisure, faith based or arts activities for care experienced children, young people and their, foster families, at low or no cost.
2. Help celebrate the achievements of care experienced children and young people by sponsoring our Annual Awards Events or donating a prize.
3. To make Christmas memorable for care experienced young people by donating to our Christmas gifts scheme

4. Become a Fostering Friendly employers by signing up to the Fostering Network's charter and promoting fostering in the workplace.)
5. Pledge, work experience, traineeships, apprenticeships, and work-based mentoring as a Dudley Career Coach for care experienced children and young people through Dudley Council
6. Sponsoring a holiday for care experienced young people who are particularly vulnerable and isolated. Care experienced young people tell us that the year after they leave care, they often can't afford a holiday and don't have anyone to go with. A holiday offers young people something to work toward, helps tackle isolation and loneliness and supports emotional well-being.

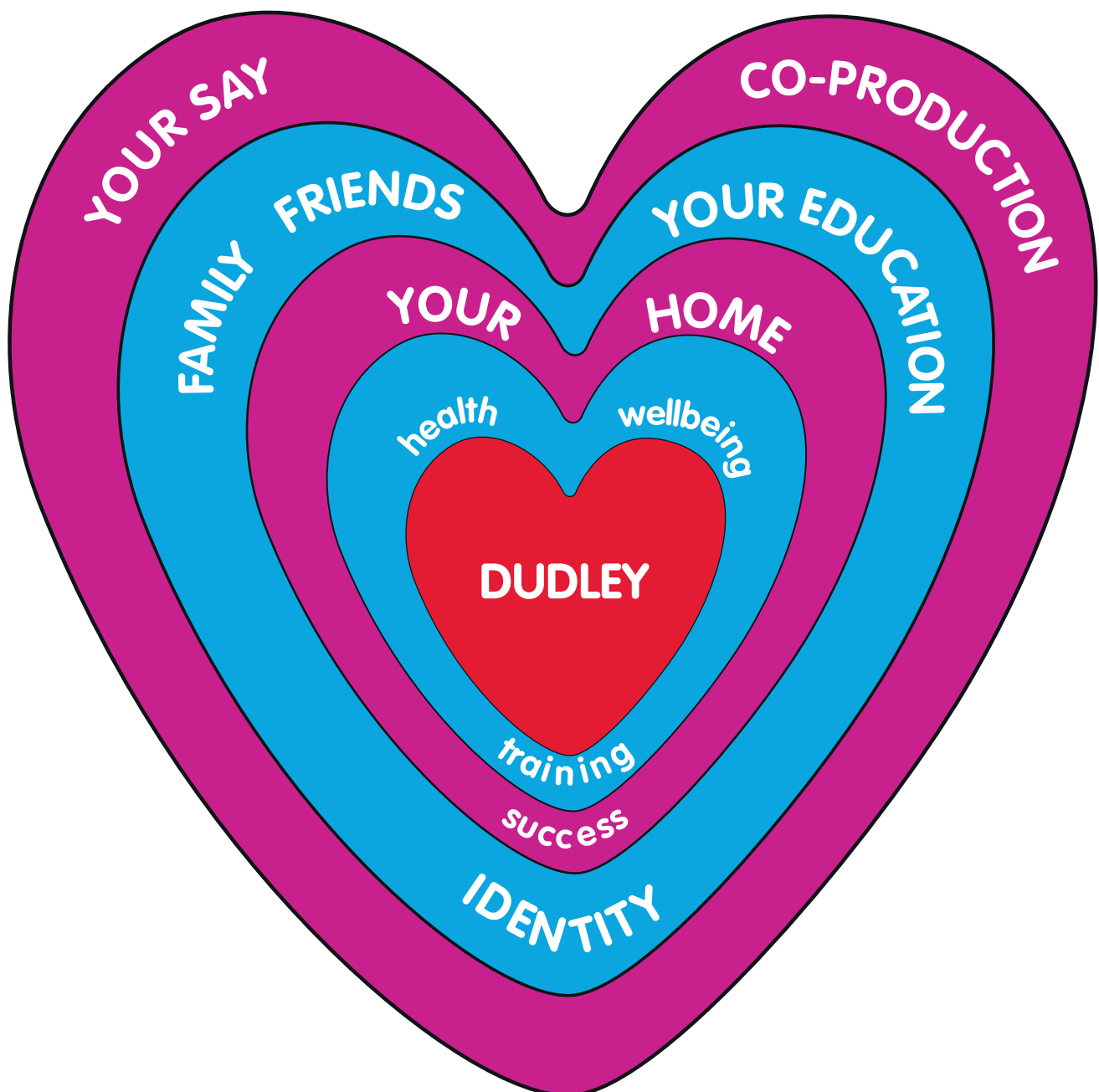
Context

At a glance	September 2020	September 2021
Number of children in our care	662	621
Rate of care	97.2	89.3
Percentage of our children in care living with foster families	59.1%	58.9%
Percentage of our children in care living outside the local authority area	45.5%	44.8%
Number of care experienced young people we support	257	237
Percentage of our experienced young people in education employment and training	39.5%	48.2%

Financial

As a Borough, we must be ambitious for our care experienced children and young people; we must do our best to equip children and young people for life with the long-term aim of reducing the over representation and on-going costs of supporting care experienced young people in vulnerable adult populations.

Commissioning services over the next few years of this plan will be exceptionally challenging, given the continued downward pressure on public finances. Nevertheless, Dudley Metropolitan Borough and partners are collectively committing to maintain strong and effective provision and improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people, while at the same time managing the effect of reducing public finances.



Our priorities

In order to achieve our vision to be good corporate parents we have coproduced the following six refreshed priorities with children, young people, and the trusted adults in their lives.

1. Your health and emotional wellbeing:

We promise to Improve health and well-being by ensuring high quality health services and information are provided to children, young people, and carers, valued, and supported.

2. Your home and where you live:

We promise that children and young people will live somewhere where they feel a sense of safety and belonging and are loved.

3. Your education, training and employment:

We Promise to Hold high aspirations and close the attainment gap for care experienced children and young people. Increase the proportion of care experienced young people in education, training, and employment.

4. Your support:

We promise that being in care is an enriching experience that equips children for a successful life.

5. Your identity:

We promise that you will have up to date information about your family, friends, and carers whenever possible.

6. Your say co-production:

We promise that children and young people are at the heart of service design, delivery, and evaluation.

Priority 1

Your health and emotional well being

As described by a care experienced young person a “traumatic childhood” can impact greatly on the short- and long-term health and well-being of our children in care and care experienced young people. The prioritisation of the Sustaining Services Strategy in the Council Plan 2019 - 2023 will ensure Children’s Social Care delivers high quality, value for money services; growing resilient families and communities, ensuring less children are in care. Care- experienced children and young people need to be able to easily access the services available, as well as making use of specialist services where necessary. The most important issue for young people is the experience or trauma they have gone through.

You said



We will

- ❖ Improve (Dudley Light House Links) therapeutic Offer to care experienced children and young people.
- ❖ Cement the Dudley Therapeutic Model across and within all services for care experienced children and young people.
- ❖ Work together in partnership to review the learning and actions from the Dudley Lighthouse Links Therapeutic Service review in July 2021. The Emotional Health and Wellbeing Working Group for the Corporate Parenting Board will ensure that our therapeutic service delivers on its promise to our children and young people in care and our care experienced young people.
- ❖ Ensure Dudley’s Restorative Practice Model for embedded for our children and young people to help them understand their lives and the part others have played to build their resilience and sense of self

Priority 2

Your home and where you live

We need to ensure access to a range of high-quality options to meet the needs of children in our care. In order to offer children stability and the opportunity to maintain important relationships we need to be able to place the majority of children in well-matched local homes near children's schools and communities.

You said



We will

- ❖ We Develop Dudley Fostering Communities to encourage family connection and support for carers and children in our Borough
- ❖ Develop psychologically informed home environments for children's homes and foster homes as part of the Dudley Model to promote good emotional regulation for children.
- ❖ We will continue to develop and invest in our children's homes
- ❖ We will maximise permanency for children in care to ensure that where possible and appropriate, children in care are provided with stable placements via adoption, special guardianship, or long-term fostering
- ❖ Review the housing needs of young people 16 - 21 years and design a new offer in conjunction with the housing department

Priority 3

Your education employment or training

We want children and young people to feel that they have somewhere to learn and develop in a setting that's right for them, and supports their personal development, as well as their educational attainment. We recognise that there are many different pathways for learning and will have high aspiration for our children and young people to achieve. We will work in partnership to provide a range of quality education and employment settings to help them develop.

You said



We will

- ❖ Promote high quality education and training pathways that enable success and opportunities for progression
- ❖ Work with Dudley Council to increase the take up of apprenticeships for care experienced children and young people.
- ❖ Ensure that Personal Education Plans and Pupil Premium are child- focused and supports the attainment and attendance of all our children, including those with special education needs and disabilities.
- ❖ Promote Restorative model to Dudley education settings and encourage all settings, especially our Alternative Learning Providers, to ensure that children are supported in a trauma- informed way.

Priority 4

Your Support

All children should have opportunities to play, socialise, exercise, and learn. We want children and young people to be able to access the same or better opportunities as their peers and enjoy new and fun experiences with their friends and other care-experienced people. We know that all children and young people experience lots of changes in their life and we are committed to supporting a smooth transition to adulthood and independence.

You said

It would be better if I had one social worker

Having a great foster mum really helps

Being unsure of what happens next is really scary

I want to meet more children in care so we can talk about or similar experiences

I have a great Young Persons Advisor

We will

- ❖ Ensure the Dudley Restorative practice Model f will enable corporate parents to consistently adopt a trauma-informed, relationship and strength-based approach. The Dudley Model concerns paying equal attention to four key areas; children, carers staff and the environment.
- ❖ Ensure that the support, training, and financial reimbursement to foster carers is sufficient to attract and retain them.
- ❖ Promote and champion the specific needs of unaccompanied and separate young people across the Borough.

PRIORITY 5

Your identity

The rich diversity of Dudley is reflected in the children we care for and we recognise the importance for children to understand their history and their journey. We want help our children strengthen their sense of identity by understanding who they are, where they came from and all that they can achieve

You said

I don't like the word placement.
It's my home

I want to be told why I am in care

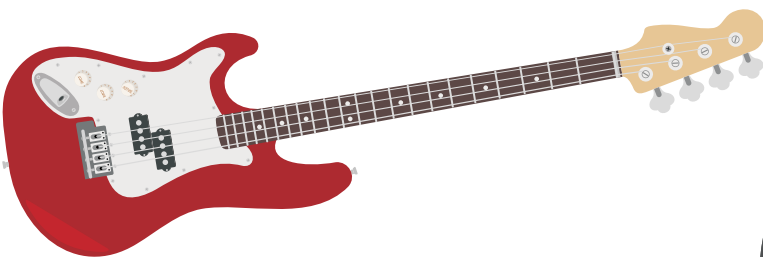
Using the word placement makes me feel I can be replaced

I want to see my brother and sister

Drop the words 'in care'
WE ARE CHILDREN

We will

- ❖ Promote and agree the right language across the Borough for care experienced children and young people, in partnership with them, to avoid jargon or language that makes them feel uncomfortable or different
- ❖ Develop Dudley's Restorative Practice model for children to understand their lives and the part others have played to build their resilience and sense of self
- ❖ Propose the inclusion of 'care experience' as a local Protected Characteristic to promote a culture of inclusion, social justice, and equality.



PRIORITY 6

Your voice - co-production

We believe that children and young people, as well as families and carers, are the experts of their own experiences which are valued and respected. Children and young people's voices must be heard to shape and design the delivery of services that are provided

You said



We will

- ❖ Work with young people and our health and education colleagues to streamline the number of meetings for children in care (Personal Education Plans, health assessments, reviews).
- ❖ Centre for Professional Practice will continue to support the mandatory Total Respect Training to raise awareness of the need for co-production with care experienced children and young people.
- ❖ We will co-produce a reviewed pledge, care experienced young people's leavers' charter and Local Offer.
- ❖ We will listen to care experienced young people regarding the right language and actively change what is possible
- ❖ In conjunction with Dudley's Voice & Influence Strategy we will involve care experienced children in all decisions that will affect their lives

