

Looked after child or young person



What is it?

A looked after child is a child or young person up to their 18th birthday who is either accommodated by, or in the care of, the Local Authority. A child is more likely to become looked after where there have been significant concerns regarding the child's welfare where it is not safe for them to remain at home with their family, or where a plan is deemed necessary for the Local Authority to share parental responsibility for the child and a court order is in place.

The Local Authority therefore has a duty as a corporate parent to ensure that any child in their care is appropriately cared for. This means that big decisions in their life, that parents would normally make, such as education, health, life choices will be guided by professionals involved in the child's life, namely the social worker, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and carers often in partnership where possible with parents.

Looked after children and young people may be placed with foster carers (including in kinship arrangements with family and friends), in children's homes, in secure accommodation or with prospective adopters. Some children may be placed with parents under a Supervision Order. However, children and young people living in private fostering arrangements are not looked after.

What does the law say about it?

A child is described as being in care when a legal order is made (such as an Interim or Full Care Order; or Emergency Protection Order). Most cases heard in court will be heard within 26 weeks and a judge will make a final recommendation on the care plan for a child and make a final order. The child will have their own solicitor and a guardian who will represent their views.

Children can also be accommodated at the request of parents or where parents are willing to provide consent, (under section 20 Children Act 1989). Also, a child or young person is accommodated if they are remanded to youth detention accommodation in which case they automatically become looked after. In addition a child is looked after when placed for adoption (but not following adoption) or when the local authority is authorised to place a child for adoption, either when parents or those with parental responsibility (PR) have given consent or through the making of a Placement Order.

Children who are provided with short breaks may also become looked after if provided with short break care.

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How do we support our looked after children and young people?

We have a looked after children service to specifically meet the needs of our looked after children and young people whether they live in Bolton or elsewhere in the country.

Every looked after child has an allocated social worker, the social worker will ensure regular contact and visit the child in their placement and attend meetings regarding the child. They assess the child's needs and work with them and with other practitioners to develop a care plan.

What do we want for our looked after children and young people?

Bolton wishes to ensure that every looked after child they are responsible for is listened to, and cared for appropriately, ensuring that their life chances are maximised to succeed to each child's potential and beyond. For many reasons children who are looked after face huge challenges if they are to overcome their disadvantages. Where children and young people are looked after, we aim to ensure more of them can live in family settings and where possible in permanent long term placements such as through special guardianship or adoption. To promote this, every child must have a permanence plan by their four month review which sets out how permanence will be achieved; seeking to avoid drift and delay and uncertainty for the child.

Educationally we are aware that children growing up in care (statistically) underperform when measured against their non-looked after friends. The statutory guidance 'promoting the educational attainment of children in care' (DfE 2014) places a duty on local authorities to do this.

The Bolton Virtual School seeks to discharge this duty by ensuring that all the children and young people we look after (pre-school to university) are encouraged and facilitated to achieve to the best of their abilities. The Virtual School monitors children's attainment and progress termly and through a system of multi-agency and child friendly personal education planning (PEP) meetings can support real schools to overcome those identified barriers to children's learning.

The Virtual School has tools to help the children's own schools with this task:

- Three learning mentors are attached to the three social work teams
- Two educational psychologists support both children and school staff
- One PEP administrator
- One support teacher (primary)
- One to one support for young people with challenging behaviour
- Teachers can be employed to provide booster support for children
- Funding is available via the Pupil Premium Grant plus
- Work experience can be provided via the LASE or QUEST scheme
- Young people Years 1-7 are encouraged to join the letterbox club
- Out of school activities are provided by the Positive Chances scheme

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The Virtual School also provides ongoing training for schools, social workers and carers to encourage them to discharge our shared statutory duty to 'promote the education of looked after children'.

The Corporate Parenting Board, on behalf of elected members oversees our Corporate Parenting awareness and is made up of elected council members, senior officers from across the council and partner agencies. The Board has the responsibility to ask the question – if this was my own child, would I think the service was good enough?

The Corporate Parenting Board should seek to ask and receive answers to key questions, for example:

- Are our children happy in our care?
- Do they make good progress in our care?
- How do they do at school?
- How many children are looked after and what types of care orders/arrangements govern their care?
- Where do they live - foster care/with family, residential care, in Bolton/out of Bolton?
- Do all looked after children have an allocated social worker?
- How many placement moves have children had?
- How many children have a statement of education and health care plan?
- What sort of progress do young people make after they leave our care?

Elected Members in their role as Corporate Parents, regularly visit children's homes in Bolton to see for themselves the high quality of the residential care we provide. Managers from across children's services and education are asked to come to the Corporate Parenting Board meetings to explain and discuss the services they provide. Senior officers from many council departments are involved in discussing the needs of the care system and responding proactively to identify need.

The LASE scheme (Looked After Supported Employment)
Putting corporate parenting into practice

Many young people who have lived in our care have had interrupted school attendance and are consequently often delayed in their academic learning. As such many are not ready to compete equally in the local employment market. The LASE scheme operates within the virtual school and seeks to level the employment playing field for young people (16-21) by providing long term work experience / training as well as bespoke support with self-confidence, preparing job applications and developing interview skills. Through LASE young people often access support teachers / mentors to improve their numeracy or literacy skills.

Council departments and local businesses are encouraged to provide this work experience and our young people will receive council contracts of employment throughout their time on the scheme. A full time employment worker supports young people and their placement providers and provides day to day management of the scheme. Many young people on LASE have gone on to be employed within the department or the company they are training with and many tell us they found the experience valuable in seeking future employment.

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The Voice4U service is managed through the Virtual School. It ensures young people are encouraged to meet up, discuss and report back to the Corporate Parenting Board on the issues they face whilst living within our care.

A care experienced young person is employed by the council to support young people in this process. Recent Voice4U events have included the Big Conversation fun day attracting over 200 young people and their carers and the annual Voice4U awards ceremony which saw a similar number of young people presented with

certificates of achievement by the Mayor of Bolton. Young people have also worked with council staff to produce booklets informing children about the experience of coming into care and the way Bolton Council keeps children safe whilst they are in our care.

The Voice4U website and blog is being developed to provide easy access information for children looked after by Bolton Council.

Young people involved with Voice4U are standing members of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Key contact...

Head of Service for Children Looked After
Tel: 01942 634530

**All the local info I need
is just a **click away!****



**Bolton
Council**