

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 24 September 2020
Title of report:	Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020 - 2023
Report by:	Cabinet member children and families

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To approve and endorse the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Care Leavers covenant.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) the draft corporate parenting strategy 2020 – 2023 (appendix A) is approved;**
- (b) Cabinet agrees to receive an annual report on Corporate Parenting to enable progress of the strategy to be monitored; and**
- (c) Cabinet agrees the Care Leavers covenant (appendix B) is approved.**

Alternative options

1. The Cabinet does not adopt a Corporate Parenting strategy. This would make it difficult to evidence the Council's commitment to corporate parenting or to define what difference it

was aiming to achieve and to evaluate what difference it had made in improving outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.

2. The Cabinet does not agree the Care Leavers Covenant. This would make it difficult to evidence the Council's commitment to corporate parenting or to justify the status as a "trailblazer" local authority for the Care Leavers Covenant.

Key considerations

3. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced a duty on councils to have regard to the following corporate parenting principles when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people;
 - to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
 - to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
 - to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
 - to 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
 - to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
 - for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
 - to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
4. To be able to evidence the Council's commitment and action in relation to these responsibilities it is necessary to have a strategy. As corporate parents it is the Council's responsibility to ensure that every effort is made to enable children and young people in care to succeed as well as their peers. Corporate parenting is a responsibility of all elected members and officers within the Council as well as statutory partners. A strategy enables the Council and its partners to be clear about priorities, what needs to be done and by who if change is to be achieved. The strategy needs to be understood, owned and monitored by full Council. The Strategy is attached in Appendix A.
5. Almost all children in care will have experienced trauma as a result of abuse and/or neglect. Although many children in care and care leavers are able to achieve well overall outcomes for looked after children and care leavers in relation to educational achievement, emotional and mental health, offending and employment are worse than their peers.
6. The Care Leaver Covenant is a programme developed under the Department for Education's (DfE) Keep on Caring policy and it aims to improve outcomes for care leavers. It seeks to create practical, specific offers by organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors to support care leavers aged 16-25 in living independently.
7. To address these challenges, the 'mission' of the Covenant is to promote five key outcomes, so that care leavers:
 - i. are better prepared to live independently;
 - ii. have improved access to employment, education and training;

- iii. experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure;
 - iv. have improved access to health support;
 - v. achieve financial stability.
8. In order to lead by example it is important for the Council to make its own covenant commitments to care leavers. The Council is a “trailblazer” local authority working with the national organisation responsible for the care leavers covenant to lead the way in improving outcomes for care leavers. The Care Leaver covenant is attached in Appendix B.

Community impact

9. It is a council priority within the county plan to “strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together” in particular the priority to “ensure that children in care, and moving on from care, are well supported and make good life choices”.
10. The strategy will also complement the Children and Young People’s plan pledges of be safe from harm, be healthy, be amazing and feel part of the community.
11. Children and young people in care are members of our community and many will live within our community as adults. Therefore doing our best to support these children and young people to achieve happy, healthy and successful lives will benefit the community in the future.

Equality duty

12. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the ‘general duty’ on public authorities is set out as follows:
- A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -
- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
13. The public sector equality duty requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying ‘due regard’ in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.

The corporate parenting strategy seeks to redress the impact of disadvantage due to being a looked after child and early life experiences of abuse and neglect. As corporate parents our responsibility is to understand the needs of all children and young people in care and care leavers and give them every opportunity to achieve their goals irrespective of their background, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability. Evidence shows that children in care and care leavers are more at risk of under-achieving in education, physical and mental health difficulties that impact upon their life experience into and throughout adulthood.

14. By agreeing the care leavers covenant the council will be demonstrating that it is proactively advancing equality of opportunity to care leavers by guaranteeing them an interview if they meet the essential criteria for a post. This supports a positive commitment already made by the council in its recruitment processes and is in line with the “disability confident” ethos that the council already supports.

Resource implications

15. The strategy is cost neutral in that practice improvements can be achieved through existing resources.

Legal implications

16. The decision to introduce the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020-2023 and the Care Leavers Covenant rests with the executive and is to be determined by the cabinet as it is an executive function.
 - The Local Authority has a legal duty to Looked after children and young people in respect of its corporate parenting principles and functions.
 - By having a strategy in place the Council can show its commitment to corporate parenting and highlight what support it can and will provide to looked after children and young people by working together with other agencies to provide a collaborative approach to best outcomes to be achieved.
 - Likewise the Care Leavers Covenant clearly shows the commitment in seeking to improve better outcomes for care leavers. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 main purpose is to help young people who have been looked after by a local authority move from care into living independently in as stable a fashion as possible. To do this it amends the Children Act (c.41) to place a duty on local authorities to assess and meet need. The responsible local authority is to be under a duty to assess and meet the care and support needs of *eligible* and *relevant* children and young people and to assist *former relevant children*, in particular in respect of their employment, education and training. The proposed covenant shows the services that we as a Local Authority shall provide to meet the duties detailed within the Act.

Risk management

17. There are no risks identified to adopting a clear strategy for Corporate Parenting
18. There are risks associated with having no clear strategy in place. There are expectations upon the Council and its partners to act as responsible and ambitious corporate parents for looked after children and care leavers. The absence of a strategy is likely to be noted as a concern by Ofsted and would bring increased scrutiny regarding the level of commitment and leadership by the Council in this area.

Consultees

19. The strategy has been developed by the Corporate Parenting panel which includes representatives from Wye Valley Trust, Clinical Commissioning Group, foster carers and Herefordshire’s Children in Care council, Your Voice Matters.

20. The Corporate Parenting panel recommended and endorsed a final version of the strategy on 18 May 2020.
21. The Corporate Parenting panel endorsed the Care Leavers covenant commitments on 18 May 2020
22. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020 - 2023 and the Care Leavers covenant was presented to the Children and Young People's scrutiny committee on the 27 July 2020 and they made the following observations:
 - *The wording of the bullet point in the care leavers covenant concerning commissioning and procurement required clarification.*
This has been reworded to provide greater clarity.
 - *A role for members of the council in respect of assisting looked after children could include the signposting of children in care and care leavers to local organisations offering work experience and apprenticeship opportunities;*
This to be considered by Councillors.
 - *Priority 5 of the corporate parenting strategy should include mention of market towns, the involvement of local communities and the youth games.*

Priority 5 applies across the County and consideration of children and young people taking part in the youth games can be considered as part of the feasibility assessment.

Appendices

Appendix A – Corporate parenting strategy 2020-2023

Appendix B – Care leavers covenant

Background papers

None