

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 18 October 2018
Title of report:	Corporate Parenting Annual Update
Report by:	Cabinet member children and families

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose and summary

To review the progress of the corporate parenting strategy.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017, introduced a new 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.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) the progress of the corporate parenting strategy as outlined at appendix 1 to this report be considered and cabinet set out any further actions to improve the delivery of the strategy; and
- (b) the executive's response to the recommendation of the children and young peoples' scrutiny committee at appendix 2 be approved.

Alternative options

1. The cabinet could decide not to receive an update on the progress of the corporate parenting strategy action plan. As part of the role of all councillors being corporate parents it was agreed within the action plan that an annual update would be provided to the executive. If cabinet decided not to receive an update then this would be in contradiction to the previous decision when the strategy was adopted

Key considerations

2. Put simply, the term 'corporate parenting' means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for children who are looked after by the council. A child in the care of the council looks to the whole council to be the best parent it can be to that child. Every member and employee of the council has the statutory responsibility to act for a looked after child in the same way that a good parent would act for their own child.
3. On 5 July 2017 the children and young people scrutiny committee considered the draft corporate parenting strategy and action plan prior to presentation to cabinet for approval. The committee made a series of recommendations as below:

- The committee welcomes the strategy, supports the priorities identified and agrees to provide a summary of comments and recommendations to the cabinet member;

Update – support noted by the Cabinet.

- The committee requests annual performance reports relating to the action plan in the strategy;

Update – annual report to current meeting of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

- The committee provides a forum, where appropriate, for children and young people in care and care leavers to hold their Corporate Parents to account;

Update – this represents an ongoing commitment by the committee which follows the involvement of two former Looked after Children at the meeting of the committee in July 2017.

- The members of the committee facilitate training, with officers, on corporate parenting to all members of Herefordshire Council;

Update – Training programme is currently being reviewed with further sessions to be delivered following elections in May 2019.

- The committee recommends that the cabinet member reviews the measures for success and outcomes sought in the action plan on a regular basis to see whether any measures need to be strengthened;

Update – Measures are contained in the action plan in the appendix.

- The committee recommends that procedures are introduced to ensure that significant decisions of the council take account formally of likely implications for looked after children;

Update – Decision reports have been amended and now include mandatory question regarding impact upon corporate parenting

- The committee recommends that members undertake a mentoring role, where appropriate, for looked after children to share skills and experience to help enhance personal development and there is consideration of how this is best facilitated and publicised; and

Update – A directory of interests and skills of members is being developed so that they can offer to support/mentor individual children and young people who wish to explore that field.

- The committee recommends that methods and strategies are investigated to engage partners and businesses in corporate parenting.

Update – Corporate parenting workshops will be offered to senior officers within the Council and partner organisations.

4. The corporate parenting strategy was approved by Cabinet on 20th July 2017. Within the action plan it was agreed that an annual report on progress of the strategy be presented to Cabinet to ensure oversight, leadership and appropriate challenge on progress. Cabinet agreed the response below to the committee's recommendations:

The draft strategy was discussed at the children's scrutiny committee on 5 July 2017; they are supportive of the strategy and associated action plan and have requested that an annual update on its implementation is presented to the committee. The recommendations have been considered by the cabinet member young people and children's wellbeing and as a consequence children's scrutiny is referred to in the action plan.

5. Appendix 1 outlines the progress made during year one of a three year strategy. Key achievements during 2017/18 include:

- Council decision reports have been amended and now include a mandatory question regarding impact upon corporate parenting
- Number of children in stable placements (2 ½ years +) has increased significantly from 74 to 101 and the number experiencing more than 3 placement moves in a year has remained low
- Looked after children in Herefordshire are achieving better than the national average and the gap between Herefordshire LAC and national all pupils has reduced
- Six care leavers studying at University with 3 expected to graduate summer 2018
- Your Voice Matters, children in care council, have clear priorities which are being supported by the Corporate Parenting panel
- Children's social care is able to directly refer to 15 units of accommodation in SHYPP

Key areas that have been slower to progress are:

- offering work experience and apprenticeships to looked after children and care leavers
- numbers of looked after children have continued to increase
- placement disruptions result in some children having to move schools
- high numbers of looked after children impact upon capacity of LAC health team
- children and young people tell us that too often foster carers have not been given the authority to make day to day decisions delegated to them
- turnover of staff in some teams remains quite high and so some children have had several changes in their Social Worker which means children and young people are unable to build trusting relationships

6. On the 31 March 2018 Herefordshire Council had 313 children in its care and were providing support for 173 care leavers.

Community impact

7. In accordance with the code of corporate governance Herefordshire Council must ensure that it has an effective performance management system that facilitates effective and efficient delivery of planned services. The council is committed to promoting a positive working culture that accepts, and encourages constructive challenge, and recognises that a culture and structure for scrutiny are key elements for accountable decision making, policy development, and review.
8. It is a council priority to 'keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life.' The delivery of the corporate parenting strategy contributes to the council achieving its ambitions in key strategies in the corporate plan, health and wellbeing strategy and children and young people's plan.
9. The corporate parenting strategy is the overarching plan that sets out how the council will meet its collective responsibility as a corporate parent. The progress of this strategy will directly impact upon the well-being of the council's looked after children and care leavers.

Equality duty

10. 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.

11. The public sector equality duty (specific 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 is intended to promote equality of opportunity for all of our looked after children and care leavers and actively work to minimise any disadvantages that they may face especially those with a protected characteristic.

Resource implications

12. There are no direct resource implications arising from the corporate parenting strategy. The delivery of the strategy would achieve significant savings if the numbers of looked after children reduced to a level comparable to our statistical neighbours. However, the purpose of the strategy is to raise the quality of care and support provided to our looked after children and care leavers by working within current resource to promote opportunities and remove obstacles that may limit the ability of children and young people to meet their potential.

Legal implications

13. Cabinet agreed that it would receive an annual report on the progress of the action plan.

Risk management

14. Without an effective corporate parenting strategy improvements in the life chances of our looked after children and care leavers would not be achieved and in all likelihood would decline. In addition to the direct impact upon children and young people this is likely to damage the reputation of the council.

Consultees

15. The children and young people scrutiny committee received the annual update and resolved that they ask the executive to encourage all members to use local contacts to identify employment and work experience opportunities for looked after children. A response has been provided in appendix 2.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Corporate parenting strategy action plan review 31 March 2018

Appendix 2 – Scrutiny recommendation response

Background papers

None identified