

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 24 October 2019
Title of report:	Corporate Parenting Annual Update 2018/2019
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.

Recommendation(s)

That:

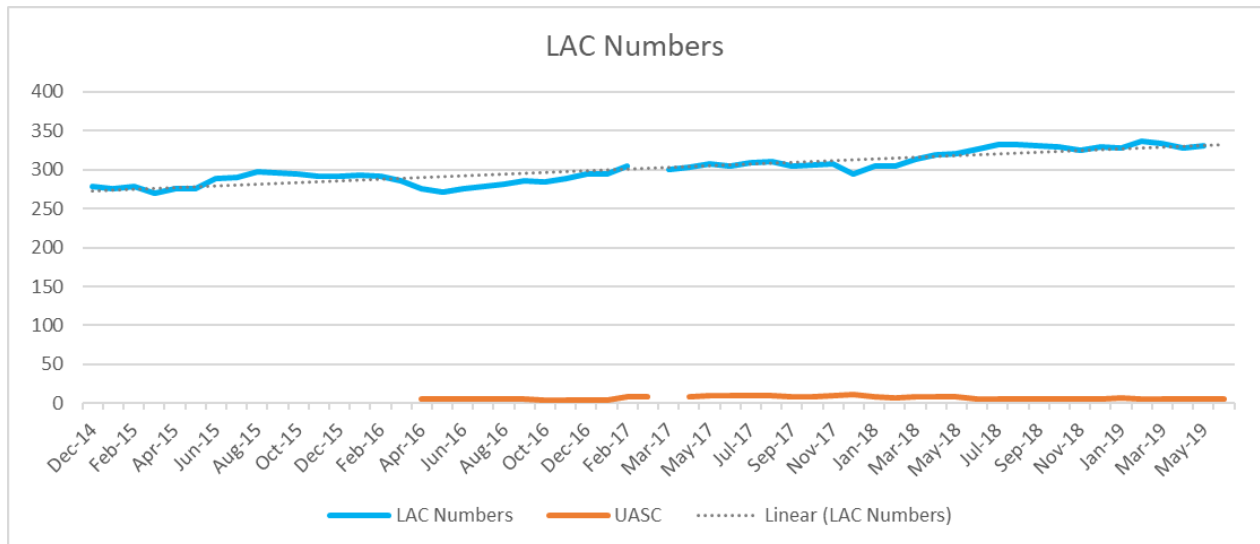
the progress of the corporate parenting strategy as outlined at appendix 1 to this report be considered and cabinet set out any further actions to improve the delivery of the strategy.

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. The corporate parenting strategy was first considered by Scrutiny committee prior to its approval by Cabinet in July 2017 and have requested regular updates on progress of the strategy.
4. Appendix 1 outlines the progress made at the end of year two of a three year strategy. Key achievements during 2018/19 include:
 - a. decision to exempt care leavers from council tax
 - b. purchase of a building to provide accommodation for care leavers
 - c. three care leavers have been employed as apprentices in the Council
 - d. six care leavers are studying at University
 - e. Housing Solutions team have employed a specialist 16+ worker
5. Key areas that have been slower to progress are:
 - a. numbers of looked after children have continued to increase although have stabilised in recent months. A new alternatives to care panel was introduced in September 2018 to scrutinise all requests for children to become looked after and this has been successful at slowing the number of children being admitted to care. During the last year additional resource was agreed to improve the support available to Special Guardianship carers and this is now resulting in new applications for Special Guardianship Orders being made.
 - b. placement disruptions result in some children having to move schools. Work continues to reduce placement disruptions by improved matching and support for foster carers.
 - c. high numbers of looked after children impact upon capacity of LAC health team. The LAC health team have developed a business case for additional resource that is being considered by the Clinical Commissioning Group.
 - d. 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 long term trusting relationships. Work continues to recruit and retain a permanent workforce and the council has invested further in the offer for social workers, including market forces supplement and implementing ideas from staff themselves such as individual learning accounts.
6. On the 31 March 2019 Herefordshire Council had 334 children in its care and were providing support for 160 care leavers. Herefordshire has a rate of 92 looked after children per 10,000 which compares with statistical neighbours rate of 53 per 10,000 and a national rate of 64 per 10,000.



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. The strategy has been effective in raising awareness and understanding of corporate parenting responsibilities amongst Councillors and Council leaders resulting in agreement to exempt care leavers from Council tax and development of more supported accommodation options for care leavers within the County.

Resource implications

12. None arising from the recommendations. The resource implications of any recommendations made by the committee will inform the executive's response to the recommendations. 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. 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;
 - a. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
 - b. to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
 - c. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
 - d. 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
 - e. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
 - f. for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
 - g. to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Risk management

14. None arising from the recommendations. The risks associated with any recommendations made by the committee will inform the executive's response to those recommendations. 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 Corporate Parenting Panel has contributed to and considered the annual review. The Corporate Parenting Panel includes as members Your Voice Matters, which represents care experienced children and young people in Herefordshire.
16. The children and young people scrutiny committee received the annual update at its meeting on 15 July 2019. The committee made no recommendations to the Executive.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Corporate parenting strategy action plan review 31 March 2019

Background papers

None identified