

Corporate Parenting

Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: Tuesday 13 December 2022

Report by: Rachel Gillott - Service Director Early Help and Safeguarding

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present the background information for the committee to review the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy, the plans for the review of the Strategy in 2023 and opportunities for policy review and development of the strategy with any recommendations to the Cabinet.

Recommendation(s)

- a) **That the contents of this report are noted by the scrutiny committee, and**
- b) **The committee offer any further constructive challenge, define any further action or recommendations to inform and support the process for the continuing commitment to corporate parenting within Herefordshire Council as required by the Children and Social Work Act, 2017**

Alternative options

Scrutiny Committee could choose not to review information contained in this report; this is not recommended as the Local Authority needs to ensure that it carries out its Corporate Parenting functions as set out in Children & Social Work Act 2017

Key considerations

1. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 sets out the Corporate parenting principles as follows:
 - (1) A local authority in England must, in carrying out functions in relation to the children and young people mentioned in subsection
 - (2), have regard to the need—
 - (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;
 - (g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
2. The [Corporate Parenting Strategy](#) notes that Corporate Parenting is the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies to give care experienced children, young people and adults (care leavers) the best start in life. A child in the care of the council should expect the whole council to be the best parent it can be. 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 Strategy sets out 4 Pledges the Council have made to improve the experience of children looked after and care leavers;
 - 1) Keeping children and young people safe – BE SAFE FROM HARM
 - 2) Improving children and young people’s health and wellbeing – BE HEALTHY
 - 3) Helping ALL children and young people succeed – BE AMAZING
 - 4) Ensuring that children and young people are influential in our communities – FEEL PART OF THE COMMUNITY
4. The current Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out 7 priorities they wanted the Council to deliver for them as corporate parents and lists the responsible leads for each
 - 1) We want our corporate parents, and other key leaders to understand and act on their responsibilities – Lead Member for Children and Young People
 - 2) We want to have a safe and stable home and life – Head of Looked After Children
 - 3) We want to reach our potential in education We want our education and training to ‘recover’ after the disruption of Covid 19 – Virtual school head teacher
 - 4) We want to be physically and emotionally healthy – Specialist Nurse, Children in Care Principal Clinical Psychologist in CAMHS
 - 5) We want to enjoy a range of play, sport, leisure and cultural opportunities - Director of Resource
 - 6) We want our voice to matter – Lead Member for Children and Young People (supported by foster carer representative and Participation and Mentoring Officer)
 - 7) When leaving care we want to live happy, healthy and financially secure lives – Head of Looked After Children and Director Of Resources
5. The overall responsibility for delivering the Corporate Parenting Strategy sits with the Corporate Parenting Board

6. In March 2022 Herefordshire Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a Peer Diagnostic Review of the functioning of the Corporate Parenting Board and make recommendations on strengthening its role.
7. The LGA met with key officers within the service and partner agencies as well as Lead Members who sit on the board. The LGA also met with young people and observed a Corporate Parenting Board.
8. The LGA identified some key strengths currently:
 - Acknowledged and recognised the need for development of the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB)
 - Improving partnerships with health, demonstrated by their attendance and professional contribution to the CPB. Acknowledgment of the improvement in communication with the Council.
 - The CPB does engage with young people from Your Voice Matters at CPB meetings, who are challenging with clearly expressed and strong views.
 - Some signs of growing understanding of their corporate parenting responsibilities across council services and partners
 - Willingness to improve across a wide range of people is evident, along with a desire to quicken the pace of change
9. LGA made the following recommendations in respect to the Corporate Parenting Board:
 - Clearer action planning and tracking of outcomes with specific time frames (SMART targets), linked to key indicators to prioritise. Streamlined minute taking with a focus on actions and outcomes.
 - Performance data dashboard (for Children Looked After (CLA) and care leavers) needs to be considered at each CPB meeting, to enable the Board to challenge and support on behalf of children and young people. However, this needs to be focused around key indicators performing well or off-target, for example health assessments and availability of dentistry to help drive required performance improvements.
 - Responding to and demonstrating that you have responded to young people's concerns. This is not evident at the moment, as young people say 'we have told you this before'.
 - Ensuring that CPB members better understand children and young people's experiences and means of communication. Update them by modern communication methods (e.g. social media)
 - Raising awareness and understanding of Working Together 2020 and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021 as a basis for the work of the Board.
10. The Corporate Parenting Board met on 24 August and accepted the recommendations and discussed proposals to strengthen the oversight and scrutiny of the Board. They were able to see a first draft of data available for CLA and Care Leavers.
11. The Corporate Parenting Action plan is in place until December 2022 but this will need to be refreshed against the requirements from the [Ofsted report](#) from the recent Ofsted Inspection (July 2022). This will be tabled for discussion at the January Corporate Board meeting.
12. In addition to the Corporate Parenting Action Plan, our current Corporate Parenting Strategy is being revised to incorporate findings from the Peer Diagnostic Review and the Ofsted Inspection.
13. The revised Corporate Parenting Strategy will be informed by the Peer Diagnostic Review, the Ofsted report in respect of the most recent Ofsted Inspection (July 2022).

14. The revised Corporate Parenting Strategy will also look towards the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#). This latter was commissioned following a government commitment to review the care system and was published in May 2022. The government is currently considering its response to this independent review.

15. Progress against the 7 priorities are:

16. Understanding Corporate Parenting:

There has been CP workshops and training which was initiated in April for all Council staff, foster carers and elected members to support understanding. The roles and responsibilities of CP is now included in all new starter induction. This will be refreshed in the New Year and rolled out again to ensure all understand their role as Corporate Parent. The aim is to deliver this jointly with care experienced young people across all Directorates.

17. We want to have a safe and stable home and life

The stability of children who are looked after is good with 87% having had one placement in the previous 12 months and 12% having two. A key performance indicator is those children who have had 3 placements moves or more and this has shown significant improvement having fallen to only 2% in the last 6 months.

18. Children who have been in the same placement for 2.5 years has increased and we are outperforming our statistical neighbours at 79%.

19. Ninety-two percent of children's looked after reviews are up to date and this is one of our key priorities. 89% of our looked after children have an up-to-date social work visit.

20. Finding available accommodation across Herefordshire can be difficult but for those young people who have additional challenges, finding accommodation can be further impacted adversely and this small cohort do experience instability. However our current performance of young people in suitable accommodation at 92%.

Consideration is currently being given to a guarantor scheme where, as Corporate Parents there is being made available a guarantor scheme to support young people in gaining accommodation of their own. It is hoped that this scheme will be in place by spring.

21. We are working with Housing colleagues on a joint working protocol to help reduce moves and suitability. The sufficiency strategy is also addressing the accommodation issues we face in Herefordshire. We have funding for a housing work for 3 years from the Department of Levelling Up and Communities. We are out to recruitment in the New Year.

22. We want to reach our potential in education

Both Key Stage assessments and tests were cancelled by the Department for Education in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid19 lockdowns. The overall achievements of the Looked after cohort in 2022 is lower than in 2019 for both Key stages.

23. For Key Stage 1, only 2 out of 5 pupils achieved at least the expected standard for all 3 subjects in 2022. For Key Stage 2 only a third of the 2022 cohort were assessed as reaching the standard for Writing, compared to over 60% in 2019

24. In 2022, only 3 out of 23 CLA achieved at least a grade 4 in GCSE English and Mathematics. GCSEs in 2020 and 2021 were based on teachers assessments and therefore not directly comparable to 2022.

25. The Virtual School is considering how best to support children in our care and is working together with education settings and school to make sure Personal Education Plans are in place for each child in our care.
26. The number of children who are not in education, employment or training (EET) is a key priority of the CPB with key actions including members supporting the identification of work experience and placements and the promotion of apprenticeships. The current figure of 41% in EET is concerning.
27. A number of training providers closed post Covid. There are now fewer places available for our young people. Additionally we need to reconsider Apprenticeships for care experienced young people across all directorates in the local authority as part of fulfilling our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.
28. *We want to be physically and emotionally healthy*
Health presented to the CPB in May and advised of the increased support available. 'Kooth' is a digital offer for Children and Young People (CYP) aged 11 – 18 (Qwell is the adult version), offering magazine articles, forums, text messaging and live counselling sessions. It offers immediate support and covers extended hours. Mental Health Support Teams in Schools (MHST) also offer evidence-based interventions for mild to moderate mental ill health presentations to CYP, in all of Herefordshire secondary schools.
29. The CCG have commissioned 'SHOUT' – a 24/7 text-based service which is free to use and not reliant on internet access. There is also Healthy Minds for young people over the age of 18.
30. The pathways for our children and young people looked after with more complex needs, to gain support for their mental health need improving. Our commissioning team are looking at the provision and pathways for C&YP with CAMHS to gain a more bespoke service to support our children at the point of accommodation. Funding for a psychologist post has been secure and we hope to recruit to this early in the New Year.
31. In respect of initial health assessments a new process has been put in place and a task and finish group has been in operation to improve the timeliness of initial health assessments. Additional funding has been approved for 2022/23 to support with additional clinic appointments within community paediatrics. Dental checks remain low at 38%.
32. *We want to enjoy a range of play, sport, leisure and cultural opportunities*
There have been a number of opportunities for young people over the holidays but we do not have an update as to the wider offer for our children from the Chair of this group.
33. *We want our voice to matter*
It is recognised that the voice of children to mould, shape and deliver services within Herefordshire needs significant strengthening. There were engagement events with young people in the spring but the work has not been fully completed to materialise this into a plan of action. The CPB advised there to be two groups one for care leavers and one for children looked after. The current participation offer is limited and the wider voice of children within our service needs strengthening. The Advocacy service and the use of Family Group Conference needs wider focus. During Care Leavers week (24th October -29th October) we undertook engagement events on the Care Leaver offer and the feedback from young people is being incorporated in the plan

34. We are reviewing our engagement and participation offer currently to ensure we have a team of staff to support this work and that we look across services as to how we deliver Voice for all of our children and young people. This service now sits in Corporate Parenting service. A refreshed children in care council for up to 16 year olds and a refreshed 'Your Voice Matters' for 16- 25 are currently being considered with our children and young people
35. The offer for Care Leavers (including the financial offer) is currently being reviewed. The current plan is for the Participation team to move within Corporate Parenting Service and the Head of Service is overseeing this. All of these areas are being looked at by the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting to inform the refreshed plan which are led and overseen by the CPB plan.

Community impact

26. The Corporate Parenting Strategy has a direct and indirect effect on the lives of both current and future children and families in Herefordshire.
27. The County Plan 2020–2024 includes the ambition to 'strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together'. Specifically, the council aims to:
 - a. Ensure all children are healthy, safe, and inspired to achieve;
 - b. Ensure that children in care, and moving on from care, are well supported and make good life choices; and
 - c. Protect and improve the lives of vulnerable people. Set out any considerations relating to community impact including contribution made to corporate plan / health and wellbeing strategy or other local or national strategies or policies.

Environmental Impact

28. There are no specific environmental impacts arising from this report.

Equality duty

29. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:
30. 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.
31. 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. Whilst this is an update to the scrutiny committees and will in itself have minimal equalities impacts, consideration has been made in the consideration of Executive decisions and the Executive Responses provided by the Cabinet.

Resource implications

32. There has been significant investment to gain additional capacity to support Childrens Services, but due to recruitment challenges not all roles have been filled. The current pressure of children within 'high cost' placements is the subject of an action group to gain permanence for these children. The recruitment of foster carers and sufficiency overall needs greater focus across the Corporate Parenting Agenda.
33. There is Corporate Sufficiency Board led by commissioners to oversee this. Project leads are commissioning a needs assessment of our foster carers and improved engagement with the wider market, to gain more homes for our children

Legal implications

34. There are no legal implications in respect of this report.

Risk management

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
The children's services budget for placements is currently overspent by £273,000 with an overall overspend of £4million	There is resource been identified to review all CLA who may be able to be reunified with their parents and to drive the permanence agenda? There is a task and finish group reviewing all children subject to higher cost provision to assure that it is meetings its objectives to gain better outcomes for children and providing value for money

Consultees

35. There has been no public consultation on this proposal

Appendices

None

Background papers

None identified.