



CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Tuesday, 15 March 2022

REPORT TITLE:	CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS STRATEGY 2022-2025
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of the report is to present members of the Corporate Parenting Board with the Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-2025.

The Strategy sets out the local authority and partners' plans as 'corporate parents' to "ensure children looked after and care leavers are valued, listened to and supported to be aspirational, to build positive relationships and achieve their full potential". It identifies several key priorities for focus over the next three years. These are:

1. **Emotional and physical health and wellbeing** – making sure you are happy and healthy all the way through your childhood and into adulthood. Enabling you to build positive relationships, strengthen your sense of identity and understand your life experiences.
2. **Independence and transition to adulthood** – Focussing on helping you learn 'life skills' from an early age and getting everything in place so you can be supported if you need it after you turn 18
3. **Positive Lived Experiences** – Making sure there are enough of the right people to look after you in suitable homes whether this is a short or long stay/time.
4. **Education and Employment** – Ensuring that you do well, have the right support in school and have the right opportunities to access employment

Underpinning each priority will be the fundamental principle to listen to the '**voice and of the child and young people**'. Attached at appendix A is a copy of the draft Strategy. A child-friendly version is attached at appendix B.

The Strategy replaces the previous Corporate Parenting Strategy which expired in 2021.

The Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-25 supports the Wirral Plan 2021-26 theme Brighter Futures. This is a key decision as it impacts on all wards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

- (1) Endorse the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-2025; and,
- (2) Agree to receive an update on the progress of the Strategy in 12 months.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The local authority has a responsibility as 'corporate parents' to provide the best possible care and safeguards for children looked after. This is not just to keep children safe, but also to promote recovery, resilience and wellbeing.
- 1.2 The Strategy provides an opportunity to agree the strategic direction for the council as corporate parents and to provide guidance and direction for colleagues and operational managers who work across the Service who directly support young people.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Refresh the Corporate Parenting Strategy: One option could be to refresh the Corporate Parenting Strategy. However, during development discussions it was considered important to reflect priorities about both children looked after and care leavers which would be better approached through a broader strategy.
- 2.2 Do nothing: The Ofsted inspection framework reviews the leadership of the Council and its approach and support for children looked after. The framework also looks at how young people are supported with emotional, education and care from an operational perspective. This Strategy provides an opportunity both to demonstrate how the council proactively prioritises the needs of children looked after whilst at the same time identifying operational change and improvement practice that will ensure that young people are looked after well.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Children and Families Act 2014 and supporting statutory guidance; "*Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers*" introduces the seven principles that local authorities and partners must have regard to when considering support for children looked after and care leavers. The principles are:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of children and young people
- to encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- to consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- to help 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 children and young people
- for 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.

3.2 The Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-2025 sets out the local authority's plans for adhering to the corporate parenting principles and ensuring it can be the best parent it can be to children looked after.

3.3 Developing the Strategy

3.4 **Priority setting – Corporate Parenting Board:** On 2nd November 2021, members of the Corporate Parenting Board held a dedicated session to discuss and explore the priorities for children looked after and care leavers. They considered a range of information which included:

- data and insight through the ChAT report
- feedback from young people delivered via representatives of the Children Looked After and Care Leaver's Councils about what was important to them
- insight and information from operational leads about service priorities and issues

This session resulted in the agreement of a set of draft priorities to be circulated wider for consultation and review by young people and the workforce.

3.5 **Workforce consultation:** Between 1st and 10th December, the draft plan on a page was shared with colleagues from across Children's Services to survey practitioners, managers and senior leaders as to their thoughts on the vision and priorities identified. The survey provided opportunity for employees to free text any specific actions or considerations which they felt were important. In total, 43 Children's Services employees completed the survey.

3.6 **Consultation with young people:** The care councils carried out a consultation on the vision and priorities with children looked after and care leavers. The consultation was designed by young people themselves and was promoted by the care council members. These were shared with the Corporate Parenting Board at its meeting on 11th January and have resulted in changes to the priorities to make sure they are child-friendly and understandable.

3.7 **Corporate Parenting Operational Group meeting:** A workshop with operational leads from Children's Services was held on 15th December to discuss and refine the priorities and discuss objectives and actions which will lead to tangible outcomes and impact. The findings and discussion from this group were incorporated into the Strategy.

3.8 Strategy vision and priorities

3.9 Following the consultation work outlined, the strategic vision and priorities have been outlined in the full strategy attached at appendix A. Our vision is: *"to ensure that children looked after and care leavers are valued, listened to and supported to be aspirational and achieve their full potential"*. A summary of the priorities and key objectives are provided below.

3.10 Priority 1 – **Emotional and physical health and wellbeing** – making sure you are happy and healthy all the way through your childhood and into adulthood. Good progress has been made over the past three years with the commission of OOMOO, the bespoke emotional health and wellbeing support offer, a new mental health crisis

team has been put in place across CLA and other frontline services and the provision of gym and swim passes for care leavers has supported improvements in emotional and physical wellbeing.

- 3.11 **Priority 2 - Independence and transition to adulthood** – Focussing on helping you learn ‘life skills’ from an early age and getting everything in place so you can be supported if you need it after you turn 18. Enabling you to build positive relationships, strengthen your sense of identity and understand your life experiences.

There has been positive progress on enhancing ‘life skills’ for children looked after through the Care Leavers Hub, which is providing one stop shop support for learning new skills and promoting independence. Further work is required on ensuring that transition arrangements (whether they include staying put, transition to adult services for some or to independent living) are seamless and young people feel confident and empowered when they turn 18.

- 3.12 **Priority 3 – Positive Lived Experiences** – Making sure there are enough of the right people to look after you in suitable homes whether this is a short or long stay/time.

The Partnership Accommodation Programme, which encompasses four key projects around residential and respite accommodation, has paved the way as an innovation change programme which will radically reshape the residential care sector.

Improvements across the Fostering Service are well documented and were recognised by Ofsted in the recent focused visit. Moving forward, we want to review the current model of offer for fostering ensuring there is dedicated training and recruitment support, develop a support offer for Special Guardians which is robust and tailored to need. We want to continue to explore new models of accommodation particularly for Care Leavers where challenges around homelessness are becoming more apparent.

- 3.13 **Priority 4 - Education and Employment** – Ensuring that you do well, have the right support in school and have the right opportunities to access employment. The Virtual School has driven significant change in the education planning for children looked after. The outcomes-based approach to the use of funding has also ensured support is targeted around the needs of individual children. Further work around inclusion, aligned to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) transformation programme will form the basis of planning and priorities moving forward.

- 3.14 Underpinning the strategy will be the voice of the child which will be the bedrock of planning, reviewing, and considering the outcomes for young people. This will transcend all the priorities within the strategy.

3.15 Governance and monitoring

- 3.16 A series of key Performance Indicators have been designed to connect to the priorities identified. These are outlined within the strategy document in the appendix. These will provide the basis for monitoring and oversight of the progress of the strategy.

- 3.17 The Corporate Parenting Board will be the lead governance arrangement for the ownership and accountability of the strategy. It will hold officers and partners to account for their delivery and the outcomes achieved. The Corporate Parenting Operational Group will be the vehicle through which the activity and priority actions will be delivered. It is intended that each Corporate Parenting Board meeting will be themed around the priorities in the strategy to ensure focus, robust monitoring and to maintain momentum about the scale of improvement required.
- 3.18 The Care Councils will also directly be engaged in providing and sourcing feedback from young people on whether things have improved. This will also form part of the evaluation and understanding the impact of the work carried out. Their involvement will form part of both delivery and oversight, continuing to share their voice and have their say. A child-friendly version of the strategy will be shared to all young people. A copy of this is attached at appendix B.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no significant implications from the report. Resources to deliver the strategy are funded. However, delivery of the strategy may result in the development of business cases or requests for additional resource/support through which specific financial implications will be outlined and addressed. This may form an additional report to the Committee, where appropriate.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The strategy will assist the Local Authority to comply with its legal responsibilities arising from primary statute, including the Children Act 1989, the Children and Families Act 2014; also, compliance with the wide range of regulations and statutory guidance that exists to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are looked after and care leavers.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 There are no significant resource implications arising from the report. The Corporate Parenting Board will be responsible for the oversight and monitoring of the strategy priorities and deliverables. The Corporate Parenting Operational Group consisting of officers from the council and partners will be the vehicle for delivery. The performance indicators identified will form part of a POWER BI dashboard, development by the Children's Data and Insight Team.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 As corporate parents, the Council and partners have a duty to safeguard and to promote recovery, resilience and wellbeing. Failure to set out a clear plan and framework for doing this presents the risk that some key actions and priorities are not considered and/or action not taken to make improvements to support young people. This carries a very real risk that young people may not be effectively safeguarded when they are in our care.

- 7.2 As a highly regulated sector, Ofsted scrutinise the role of the local authority in putting the right support and services in place for children looked after and care leavers. This is considered at various levels around leadership and management as well as support for children looked after. It is important that we continue to evidence our commitment and approach to our young people. Failure to do so may result in heightened scrutiny by Ofsted and potential reputational damage should the findings of inspection find significant weaknesses in our approach.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Section 3.3 of the report provides a detailed overview of the consultation and engagement which has taken place to develop the strategy. In summary this includes engagement with the following key stakeholders:
- Corporate Parenting Board (consisting of elected members, foster carers, care councils, Council senior officers, partners from health and the police)
 - Members of the care councils (consisting of children looked after and care leavers)
 - Children's Services staff (consisting of frontline practitioners, social workers, senior managers, other staff)
 - Operational Managers (Placement commissioning, Permanence, fostering, Care Leavers, Participation and Engagement)
- 8.2 These stakeholders will continue to form part of the evaluation and monitoring of the strategy as it progresses.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed as is available here:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 As corporate parents we must treat children looked after as if they were our own. Like any parent, it is important that we play a role in teaching our young people about the climate emergency and how to proactively support the environment. One of our objectives will be to consider how we can promote positive approaches to the environment through education and life skills for care leavers.
- 10.2 Many Wirral schools attended by our children looked after are proactive in positive education about protecting the environment and through our education priority we would hope that improved learning and education outcomes will relate to this.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Priority 4 of the Strategy focuses on employment and education. There have already been positive developments around supporting Wirral care leavers into local

employment. A successful apprenticeship programme has resulted in many care leavers finding local, long-term employment including in the Council itself.

- 11.2 It is hoped that moving forward, this priority will help shape further opportunities, particularly through the Care Leaver Covenant, to ensure that our care leavers continue to access employment locally, live in local homes and support the local economy.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-2025
Appendix B – Child-friendly version – Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019 -2021
Care Leavers Covenant
Statutory Guidance - “Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers”

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date