



CABINET – 17TH DECEMBER 2019

CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to present to the Cabinet the final draft of the Corporate Parenting Strategy that sets out the responsibilities of Leicestershire County Council as corporate parent to children in care. The Strategy outlines the key principles and expectations that provide the framework for a cohesive and effective corporate parenting response for children in care and Care Leavers.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that
 - a) The responses to the consultation and comments of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee are noted;
 - b) That the Corporate Parenting Strategy be submitted to the Council for approval on 19 February 2020.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. The feedback has informed the final Corporate Parenting Strategy which will provide the basis for the Council's corporate parenting role. The final Strategy must be submitted to full Council for approval and implementation as it forms part of the Plans Framework in the Council's Constitution (Part 2, Schedule 2).

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

4. The draft Strategy was considered by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5th November 2019. It will be submitted to the Council in February 2020 for approval.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

5. The Corporate Parenting Strategy applies the corporate parenting principles as set out in section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to which local authorities must have regard.
6. Local Authorities in England must have regard to statutory guidance in relation to the appointment of the Director of Children's Services and the designation of the Lead Member for Children's Services, which describes how those roles set the tone for the local authority to be an effective corporate parent.
7. In May 2019 the Cabinet agreed the Council's approach to support for care leavers, following on from the launch of its 'Promise to children in care and care leavers' in April 2019.
8. In June 2019 the Cabinet received a report of the Scrutiny Review Panel on Corporate Parenting and accepted its recommendations.
9. The Corporate Parenting Strategy forms part of the Council's Policy Framework (Schedule 2 to Part 2 of the Constitution). It supports the Council's Strategic Plan outcome for wellbeing and opportunity and keeping people safe and sits alongside the Children and Family Services Department Care Placement Strategy 2018-2021 and the Children and Family Services Continuous Improvement Plan 'The Road to Excellence'.

Resource Implications

10. There are no resources implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

11. This report will be circulated to all members of the Council.

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PART B

Background

12. The Cabinet received a report at its meeting on 13 September 2019 seeking approval to consult on the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy. That report set out the legislative background to the Council's role as 'Corporate Parent' and the principles under which it operates, namely -
- To act in the best interest, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, 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.
 - To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Consultation

13. Consultation on the draft Strategy took place between 16th October and 5th November 2019. This included consultation with children and young people in care and care leavers through attendance at SYPAC (Supporting Young People After Care) and the Children in Care Council. A wide range of partners were also consulted including the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership. This included representatives from LPT, UHL, CCGs, Police, district councils, the Voluntary and Community Sector, Secondary Head Teachers, Primary School Head Teachers, Further Education colleges and the Council's Adults and Communities Department.
14. The draft Strategy was considered by the Corporate Parenting Board on 22nd October 2019, giving further opportunity for partners from health (CCGs and LPT), Police and district councils to have an understanding of the purpose of the Strategy and to give feedback on the draft document.
15. The consultation ensured that the voice of children as to 'what makes a good corporate parent' was represented in the final document.
16. The feedback from partner agencies and members was that the Strategy was an informative and comprehensive document which gave a good overview of aspirations, expectations and roles. A number of small changes were made to the language used, including to clarify actions and outcomes.

17. The main feedback from both children and adults was that whilst the document was informative it was not particularly child-friendly. In response to this a task and finish group has been established with a group of children in care and care leavers to develop a briefer child-focused document.

Views of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

18. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the draft Strategy at its meeting on 5th November 2019. The Committee welcomed the Strategy and identified that the collective and individual responsibility of Councillors had been detailed through the seven key principles.
19. Recognising the importance of the Strategy and developing the role of elected members as corporate parents was highlighted. The need for accountability and challenge was also discussed and it was identified that the Children in Care Panel would be a good forum to hold members to account in addition to the three member champions in the specific areas of education, training and work, housing and accommodation and health. The Committee also noted that the success of the Scrutiny Review Panel had been reinforced through the agreement reached with district councils to remove the paying of council tax for care leavers up to the age of 25.

The Strategy

20. The Strategy describes the Council's Corporate Parenting role for the 613 children and young people in care and 229 care leavers who are currently in the care of the Authority (as at August 2019) and the importance of voice and choice, safety, achievement and self-esteem in raising the aspirations for these children.
21. The Council's "Promise" to children in care and care leavers sets out its commitment and that of partners such as the district councils, the health sector and voluntary organisations, to provide the best support, guidance and care to children in care and care leavers.
22. The Strategy details that the lead member for children's services (LMCS) and the Director of Children's Services (DCS) are required by law to hold direct local accountability for the effectiveness, availability and value for money of the local authorities children's services (in 1998, the Secretary of State wrote to councillors reminding them that they are ultimately accountable for the quality of care provided by their local authority and set out their specific responsibility to lead this work and monitor its effectiveness).
23. This position has been supported through published guides for councillors by the Department for Education in 2003 and 2013, highlighting that all elected members should be prepared and ready to champion the interests of looked after children and young people in their community. Elected members are in the unique position to promote opportunities for looked after children and care leavers through their political power and influence, through their connections in the community, schools, health services, local businesses and employers.

24. Leicestershire’s governance arrangements are detailed in the Strategy, highlighting that strong corporate parenting means strong leadership, challenge and accountability at every level. The governance arrangements that underpin our Corporate Parenting approach focus on the importance of the voice of children and how they experience the support they receive, feel listened to and taken seriously. The Council’s governance arrangements enable challenge and reflection on how effectively it is applying the corporate parenting principles and ensuring the high level of care that it strives to provide.

Equalities and Human Rights Implications

25. Equality and human rights implications are addressed throughout the Strategy as the aim is to improve standards and outcomes for all children and young people in care, including disabled children, young children and those from minority and harder to reach groups.
26. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment was undertaken on the Strategy that identified no adverse impacts and an overall positive impact.

Appendices

Appendix A: Final Draft Corporate Parenting Strategy
Appendix B: Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment

Background Papers

The Children and Social Work Act 2017

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents/enacted>

Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services and the Lead Member for Children’s Services

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271429/directors_of_child_services_-_stat_guidance.pdf

Children Act 1989: care planning placement and case review

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441643/Children_Act_Guidance_2015.pdf

Children Act 1989: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397649/CA1989_Transitions_guidance.pdf

Report to the Cabinet on 13 September 2019 “Corporate Parenting Strategy”

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=5605&Ver=4>

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