

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE

9TH MARCH 2021

REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY – 2019- 2022

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update of how the Corporate Parenting Strategy – 2019- 2022 has been implemented since the strategy was launched in 2019 and the impact it has achieved thus far.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Corporate Parenting Strategy is the framework for the role of every Local Authority and their relevant partners (as defined in section 10 of the Children Act 2004) in the application of the corporate parenting principles, as set out in section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The Local Authority must have regard to the seven needs identified in the Children and Social Work Act when exercising their duties and responsibilities in relation to looked-after children and care leavers (relevant children and former relevant children). It should be read and applied alongside the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review and The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers.
3. Local authorities in England need to have regard to the 2013 Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services in relation to the appointment of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) and the designation of the Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS). This guidance describes how those roles set the tone for the local authority to be an effective corporate parent.
4. The Corporate Parenting Strategy was presented to Overview and Scrutiny on 5th November 2019.
5. The Strategy has been in place since 17th December 2019. There is to be an official launch of the young person's version in April 2021. A video has been designed by members of the Children in Care Council and is now in final production stages. Unfortunately, due to the impact of COVID19 restrictions, this made the development of the video more difficult, due to the logistics of getting voice recordings and meeting with young people. The draft version was presented to the Corporate Parenting Board on 19th January 2021, where positive feedback was received.
6. When the young person's version is launched in April 2021 the main strategy will be relaunched. A meeting with Communications is arranged for the 5th March to plan the launch both internally and across partner agencies, circulation using social media platforms with young people and shared across Children's Services so that all practitioners are aware of their roles and responsibilities in delivering key objectives.

Background

7. Leicestershire County Council is currently the corporate parent to 694 children and 194 Care Leavers (as at 21/01/21). As a corporate parent, the County Council has a collective responsibility to be a good parent to children and young people in its care and is expected to do what any responsible parent would do for their children.
8. Leicestershire has a strong corporate parenting ethos which recognises that the care provided for children is not just about keeping them safe. It recognises the importance of stability for children and the Permanence Policy sets out the commitment to children in the care of the County Council and the ambition to secure emotional attachment, physical stability and long-term commitment to children. It also aims to ensure that all children in care receive access to appropriate, high quality and stable education, thus affording them with positive educational experiences.
9. When a child comes into care, the local authority becomes the Corporate Parent. Put simply, the term 'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of the local authority, elected members, employees, and partner agencies for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by Leicestershire County Council.
10. There are seven corporate parenting principles introduced by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which comprise of seven needs that local authorities in England must have regard to whenever they exercise a function in relation to looked-after children or care leavers. The seven corporate principles are:
 - a. To act in the best interest, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, 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.
11. The corporate parenting principles are intended to secure a better approach to fulfilling existing functions in relation to looked after children and care leavers and for the local authority to facilitate, as far as possible, secure, nurturing, and positive experiences for looked after children and young people and enable positive outcomes for them.
12. These seven principles are embedded in Our Promise to children in care and care leavers, which has been signed up to by the Leicestershire County Council, Elected Members and a range of partner agencies and launched in April 2019. These promises include:
 - a. We will support you
 - b. We will respect your identity
 - c. We will listen to you
 - d. We will believe in you
 - e. We will support you to find a place you can call home
 - f. We will inform you
 - g. We will be a lifelong champion

Update on the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the impact achieved to date

13. The Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines the responsibilities of Leicestershire County Council as a corporate parent to its children in care and care leavers. The Strategy outlines

the key principles and expectations that provide the framework for a cohesive and effective corporate parenting response. In addition to being a driver for Leicestershire's commitment to inspire, support and enable ambitious goals and success for its children, it also provides a structure for accountability and opportunity for challenge by children, the Corporate Parenting Board and member champions.

COVID 19

14. Within three months of the Strategy being approved, the service faced the difficult challenges presented as a result of COVID19. During the pandemic, the priority has been to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our children, families and workers. Ensuring the children whom the service is Corporate Parents to continue to receive a high-quality service, have their needs met and are supported to reach their full potential, whilst working with the challenges presented due to COVID19 restrictions.
15. During the COVID period the service has ensured services have continued to meet the needs of children and young people. This has required flexible working, being creative with the use of technology to ensure contact was maintained as well as managing Government guidance and restrictions. The service has continued to meet with children and young people virtually as well as face to face where possible, ensuring they have the support and guidance needed. For care leavers, particularly those who live on their own, the service has ensured they are offered more regular contact and when there have been particularly challenges the service has ensured it can provide supportive accommodation, for example, during this time. The service has provided support through financing mental health support and counselling for children in care and care leavers where they don't meet the threshold of CAMHS or adult services. The service has ensured all its children and young people have the digital support they need to enable them to home school/college when appropriate. Looked after children have been able to continue to attend school as vulnerable groups. The service has also ensured that children have been able to continue to see their families where it is safe to do so and if this has not been possible face to face, virtual contacts have been facilitated.

Children in Care Service

16. The children in care service has developed Our Promise across the service. All young people received a copy of the leaflet which outlined the Promise to them and this will be added to the information given to young people as they come into care.
17. Partner agencies have attended meetings and mapping events to review the support they give both children in care and care leavers. For example, the districts have enabled children to receive support with leisure passes and also information regarding opportunities for out of school/college activities. An annual report on the impact of the Promise on children in care and care leavers will be prepared by the end of August 2021.
18. Over the last year COVID has presented the largest challenge to the services provided and at the forefront is the impact of this on children and young people. The service has ensured, for example, that when young people need stronger support or carers need further support to manage challenging situations, this is provided.
19. One of the challenges services have faced is the ability to ensure children and young people see their families. The position remains that all contacts are face to face when this is safe to do so. All children and young people have COVID risk assessments which outline the agreements in place for that family. Where children are very young and therefore are unable to socially distance this can mean the service is more creative around contact, for example virtual story telling or games.
20. With the older young people, staff have continued to develop and maintain contact and support and when young people find the COVID restrictions a challenge the workers will address this with them. The providers and carers commissioned over the COVID period

have worked with the service to help with those young people who have struggled to pay due regard to the rules and guidance.

21. For Unaccompanied young people, a resource has been identified which can allow the quarantine for 14 days of young people coming into the service. Leicestershire has also this year accepted three young people from another authority to give them long term stability and support.
22. The service has continued to grow in terms of not only children needing support but staff within the different areas. The department has agreed extra capacity to ensure the children and young people have the right support at the right time.
23. In terms of stability for children and young people, the service has worked with other teams to develop processes which allows it to find the right placement for the right child at the right time. Sustainability and suitability are key. Children feeling emotionally and physically safe means the service has developed its permanency process and has agreed permanency for children and young people more often. This doesn't mean that some children will never go home but it gives children the safety they need to feel like they won't just be moved.
24. Positively, writing to the child has been introduced over the last twelve months. This has meant workers, carers, managers, senior managers are recording to the child. The notes and reports are more focused, less full of jargon and give a clearer sense of the journey of the child. The impact of this is young people understand the reports and when a young person comes back to access their records in the future they get a better sense of themselves and their childhoods.

Fostering Service

25. The fostering service ensures its foster carers work to the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Fostering and they advocate for young people. It ensures that accommodation and bedroom space is appropriate and provides training to carers via CAMHS and individual consultations to ensure young people have their mental wellbeing promoted.
26. In foster carers reviews, the service actively seeks both the views of fostered children and birth children. Staff consult with children individually to ensure their views regarding their living arrangements are sought. The service engages in participation activities throughout the year and during Covid 19 restrictions the service helped young people to express themselves through art, ran a talent show and regularly held events on its closed Facebook page to allow the young people to express themselves.
27. End of placement interviews for young people are undertaken by the service where they have moved on from a foster parent to recognize themes, concerns, and good practice that can be shared across the service. Consultation events are held for both fostered and birth children to recognize improvement activities. An Independent Visitors Scheme is operated to allow children and young people the opportunity to have time away from carers/ workers to enjoy activities without the pressure of feeling that they are being "Social worked", allowing free flowing conversation, engagement in "normal activities" with a safe adult.
28. The service supports its foster carers to be aware of all engagement opportunities and ensure young people gain access; this is monitored through supervision visits, un-announced visits, reviews and voice and choice work undertaken with foster children. The SSW spend time with all looked after children in placement building a relationship so when visits take place, they feel confident to raise any concerns.
29. Carers support young people to attend engagement activities and the service supports young people to remain in Staying Put arrangements to allow them to meet their aspirations with the support of carers who know and support this. The service has developed its supported lodgings scheme to also support young people to remain in education / training.

30. The service supports and promotes Staying Put and increased its Supported Lodgings Providers scheme to ensure young people have access to family-based care post 16.
31. The service has supported all its carers to attend training opportunities to ensure they are aware of the educational / health opportunities.
32. Stability meetings are held where there is a risk of breakdown and there is a specialist team that works with carers to support placement stability and step down from residential care to family-based care.
33. All foster carers, Staying Put and Supported Lodgings Providers work to help the young people develop their independence skills and they can work towards an ASDAN award in independence. Staff ensure that within foster carer reviews, plans for young people are discussed so carers and young people are clear what the plan is. The Staying Put Scheme is currently being revised.

Leaving Care Service

34. The care leavers team has developed the work with the fostering service, as well as the Staying Put and Supported Lodgings Service. The team is engaging with the districts in terms of social housing as well as using the private rental market when appropriate.
35. The team and the service ensure all young people have a clear pathway plan which identifies their needs going forward. Young people are encouraged to complete the ASDAN award which looks at the skills and knowledge they have and how this can be accredited to enable it to be an award.
36. The high-risk Care Leavers Panel has continued to provide robust oversight and a multi-agency response to their needs. The meeting is attended by agencies such as the Police, Health, Districts and the Bridge. Due to the success of this panel there has been a Children in Care Panel to review the high-risk children in care. The two panels allow agencies to discuss cases where there are multi agency worries to see who else may be best placed to support the child or young person, particularly when the child or young person doesn't want to fully engage with their social workers or Personal Advisors.

Member Champions

37. In 2020, following a Scrutiny Review Panel, the Leader of the Council agreed to the establishment of three Elected Member Champions. Individual panels were established to focus on Health, Housing and Education. These are multi agency and for each panel a Member is assigned to take a lead role in progressing actions and engaging with external partners to advocate on the behalf of care leavers. This has given an elevation to the panels which has meant that there has been progression across the districts in different areas.
38. A young person also attends each panel to represent the views of young people. He has been enabled, for example, to share what he felt would have helped him when he got his own place, what it feels like to be lonely or what it feels like when you don't know where to go when something goes wrong. This has meant that members of the panel who have not experienced this situation and have good levels of support can appreciate, for example, what it's like to close the door at night and have no one. Panel members have been able to ask questions and get the right answers and it has also meant that agencies, such as the Bridge (which is a charity), have been able to support young people in tenancies with a first-hand experience of the young person's voice.
39. There have been early indicators of the positive impact that the three panels are having to effect change and communication across partners. The Health Panel, for example, has had a definitive role in developing an offer across the districts which includes linking in with local opportunities to get active, Leisure Offers which are in partnership with Everyone Active, and opportunities to train as coaches, cycle leaders, walk leaders, run leaders etc. The

Housing Panel has supported with effective communication to ensure that there is a joint approach to housing issues. Care Leavers are central to the discussions and decisions from all of the panels and the focus is having a positive impact on their outcomes.

Corporate Parenting Team

40. During the Covid-19 lockdown from March 2020, a key priority of the workers within the Corporate Parenting Team, including the Children's Rights Officers and Participation Officers, was to make contact with all children and young people either in residential placement and 16+ accommodation. This was primarily to check on their well-being, ensure they were receiving the support they needed and offer any additional support around advocacy. With each contact the worker completed a short questionnaire on the young person's experiences since lockdown, how they felt they had been coping, the support they had received or needed. This information was then recorded on the child/ young person's file with any significant issues raised with their social worker.
41. Staff within the Children in Care Service ensured that all children and young people had regular contact and video calls were used to ensure good working relationships were maintained and children had an opportunity to share their views.
42. Statutory duties have been maintained and Covid risk assessments were completed to ensure all the children's needs were recognised and being met.
43. Feedback from the young people was that they were receiving a good level of support from social care, often reporting having a greater frequency of contact with their social worker or Personal Advisor than before lockdown.
44. Some young people did take up the offer of advocacy, for example to support in arranging contact with their family or to ensure they were getting the correct allowances.
45. One Participation Officer led on Leicestershire's contribution to the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland 'Coronavirus Health and Wellbeing Conversation for Young People June 2020'. This was developed following on from the Barnardo's 'Big Barnardo's Conversation' campaign in May 2020 to highlight the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people across the UK. This is a detailed report which highlights a number of positives children and young people experience during lockdown as well as the significant amount of challenges, most notably practical issues such as accessing dentists and other services and the impact of feelings of isolation and increased concerns about mental health.
46. The Children in Care Council was initially paused at the start of lockdown but has taken place each month since July 2020 with the exception of the usual summer break in August. All the meetings have been virtual and the feedback from young people on these meetings has been very positive; they have been well attended with an average of fifteen or more children and young people present at each meeting.
47. Supporting Young People After Care (SYPAC) was also initially paused and then moved to virtual meetings. The care leavers valued the opportunity to 'meet' with other young people. SYPAC had its first face to face meeting just before Christmas, 15 young people attended and enjoyed the activities and quiz and all being in a room together (albeit socially distanced). The Children in Care Council and SYPAC intend to move to face to face meetings more frequently as restrictions allow and all safety measures will be taken.
48. Choir has continued to meet throughout the lockdown period, although it has not been possible to arrange for everyone to sing together. They have been meeting virtually each week for quizzes and other activities to keep the cohesion of the group together in the hope they can all meet up and sing together again in the near future.
49. The Corporate Parenting Board has continued to meet throughout the year virtually. This has continued to be well represented by partner agencies, and children and young people members have continued to attend and take a lead role in these meetings.

50. Participation Officers arranged a Leicestershire's Got Talent event whereby any looked after young person could submit a three minute video to showcase their talents. Participation Officers also arranged an interactive online art class for half term in October 2020, where each participant received paints, a canvas and easel and were given an online lesson on how to paint a lion. Again, this was another great event with everyone who took part producing brilliant pictures which will be shared on the next Corporate Parenting Newsletter. The Fostering Service arranged a Christmas Card competition and there had been five entries; these were sent to carers, children and young people.

Youth Justice Team

51. In December 2020, the Youth Offending Service (YOS) Management Board agreed to re-brand the Service based around the guiding principles of child-first and trauma informed practice. The Board agreed to replace negative terms, such as youth offending, in favour of an asset-based approach around inclusion and youth justice. The YOS is now formally the Youth Justice Team and embedded in a wider Youth and Justice Service and continues to be governed by the now Youth and Justice Management Board.
52. The Service has made a commitment to children to put them first in all that it does (child first, offender second), to support and listen to them, to advocate on their behalf ensuring that all children are given fair opportunities and that discrimination is tackled and inclusion is promoted. Underpinning this is a fundamental commitment to build positive relationships with children, only introducing new workers when there is a defensible decision to do this and training practitioners in new systems and frameworks to support this, such as youth workers being trained to undertake youth justice assessments.
53. The Youth and Justice Service continues to ensure that robust measures are in place to ensure that Looked After Children are not over-represented in the youth justice cohort and works with partners to divert children away from the Criminal Justice System where possible through the adhering to the ten point checklist for dealing with concerning behaviour in Children's Homes when the Police are called and by using supportive outcomes at the Out of Court Disposal Panel and through the health related Liaison and Diversion scheme.

Education

54. The Leicestershire Virtual School (VS) delivers well-received specialist training about attachment and trauma (A&T) and practical strategies which can be used to support children exhibiting behaviours related to their prior trauma and attachment needs. In the 2019-20 academic year, a severely curtailed training programme (due to Covid-19) saw the VS deliver A&T training to 426 school staff.
55. Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) concerns are addressed at individual Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings where children's voice is gathered, either in written form or by the child's attendance, to plan appropriate individual interventions. In the 2019-20 academic year, 70% of a total of over 1,200 PEPs had pupil views either in written form or delivered in person. New online methods of gathering voice are being trialed (surveys) to ensure maximum uptake of opportunity for children to express their views. Other means of gathering voice will be considered, including audio and video recordings once a platform is available to record and store them securely. Feedback is always gathered after participation events to inform future planning.
56. VS promotes and signposts relevant support services for children, monitoring closely education processes such as school admissions and EHCP, in the expectation of timely and high-quality support and interventions.
57. The pandemic lockdown has adversely affected the organisation of VS aspirational, educational participation activities, some of which have moved online, but others have unfortunately had to be cancelled.

58. Covid has also impacted on the availability of County Council apprenticeships and other work opportunities for care leavers. Working from home and new pay arrangements for County Council apprentices (paid at grade of post) have led to fewer apprenticeships arising and when they do, being taken up by people already in post within the County Council. Independent Living ASDAN courses remain available and some completed folders are filtering through.

Health

59. The Looked after Children's Nursing service provided by Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT), in line with national guidance '*NHS Covid 19 Prioritisation of Community Services*', has continued to maintain a service to the most vulnerable cohort of children/young people in Leicestershire throughout the pandemic.
60. Although the national pandemic has considerably challenged us, the health and welfare of looked after children (LAC) has remained a key priority and alternative solutions have been applied to the provision of Review Health Assessments (RHAs) in order to continue meeting the needs of LAC. The virtual telehealth platform has worked effectively for the service, where it has been able to reach previously hard to reach young people. However, the risk imposed by the pandemic to children, young people and carers was carefully balanced against the health needs of LAC and a robust risk assessment was applied to all caseloads, which enabled the service to identify the most vulnerable children and young people, i.e. those at risk of CSE/going missing, UASC, complex needs, poor engagement with the service. All RHA requests are assessed and triaged on an individual basis with regard to the need to offer either a face to face contact or telephone/video contact. This is supported by a robust risk criteria framework as identified above and the LAC nurse's individual professional judgement.
61. LPT has also worked closely with local authority partners to ensure that all LAC who have an EHCP/and or SEND are able to continue accessing support to meet their essential health needs during the Covid-19 response.

Summary

62. Covid-19 has brought real challenges to the workforce; however it is evident that what has remained the key priority is ensuring that children and young people remain safe, have their needs met, including access to education, regular contact with people who are important to them (albeit this may at times have been via virtual means), ensuring their health needs remain met, that they have regular contact with their Social Worker and/or Personal Advisor, as well as ensuring their voice remains heard and an active part of decision making.
63. The service has worked hard to ensure that its children and young people have been prioritised, that it continues to fulfil its roles and responsibilities as Corporate Parents to a high standard, delivering the promise to its children in care, whilst also providing opportunities for young people to share their views, engage in different activities and continue to have fun and support.

Next Steps

64. The young person's version of the Corporate Parenting Strategy will be launched in April 2021.
65. To continue to ensure that the service meets the roles and responsibilities as Corporate Parentings, managing the changing requirements relating to COVID19, whilst ensuring children are well supported and their needs met.
66. To look at reintroducing more direct contact with children and young people, as restrictions and safety measures allow.

67. To continue to measure success against the five outcomes identified within the Strategy:

Outcome 1 Improved Physical Health	Outcome 2 Improved Mental Health	Outcome 3 Placement stability and safe homes	Outcome 4 Attainment	Outcome 5 Care leavers
<p>Children will:</p> <p>Have improved timeliness of Health Assessments</p> <p>Be registered with a GP</p> <p>Be registered with a dentist</p> <p>Be up to date with all their immunisations</p> <p>Have improved timeliness of Health Assessments</p>	<p>Children will:</p> <p>Be supported through evidence-based interventions to maximise their emotional and mental well being</p> <p>Have improved Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire results.</p> <p>Be referred to specialise mental health services and receive treatment in a timely manner where appropriate</p> <p>Benefit from joined up multi agency working to drive relationship-based approaches</p>	<p>We will:</p> <p>Where appropriate seek to place children and young people within 20 miles of their home address</p> <p>Where appropriate seek to place children and young people within long term, in house provision</p> <p>Ensure children have improved placement stability</p> <p>Our discharge planning will secure improved outcomes for care leavers</p> <p>Make timely decisions regarding permanence and the use of SGO's and Child Arrangement Order to be used where appropriate</p>	<p>Children will:</p> <p>Be supported to achieve their full potential</p> <p>Have a Personal education plan which will be aspirational and ambitious</p> <p>Have their progress at school monitored and every child will receive tailored support from a specialist advisor</p>	<p>We will:</p> <p>Support care leavers to find safe, stable and suitable places to live, making sure they are as well prepared as they can be</p> <p>Will give opportunities to keep in touch with them until they are 25 and have high aspirations for them</p> <p>Support care leavers to remain with their long-term foster families after they have left the care of Leicestershire if that is in the best interests of the young person</p> <p>Support care leavers to become independent adults by helping to secure high quality education, training or employment opportunities</p>
Best possible outcome for our children				

Consultation

68. Children in Care and care leavers took part in consultation sessions on 16 and 30 October 2019. All children's safeguarding partners shared their views. These were all considered and included within the final document.
69. Children in Care Council members have been involved in the production of the children's version of the Strategy. This was shared at the Corporate Parenting Board where positive feedback was received.

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

Appendices

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