

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO COUNCIL

6 JUNE 2018

REPORT OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

CORPORATE PARENTING – REFRESHING OUR APPROACH

SUMMARY

This report proposes a series of measures to further the approach to corporate parenting in Stockton. It includes measures to strengthen the accountability of our approach, improve its visibility and profile, to respond to the requirement of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, to ensure that all officers and members are clear about their role and have options for how to be further involved if they choose to do so. Most importantly the measures will result in demonstrable outcomes and benefits for children and young people in care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is requested to:

1. Note the proposals in this report;
2. Agree the new strategy for children in, and leaving, our care 2018-21;
3. Agree the establishment of a Corporate Parenting Board that will be politically balanced and consisting of 7 elected Members.

DETAIL

What is corporate parenting?

1. Every good parent wants the best for their child, to see their child flourish with good health, to be safe and happy, to do well at school, to enjoy good relationships with their peers, make the most of leisure opportunities, hobbies and interests, and to grow towards adulthood equipped to lead independent lives and to make their way as adults in higher education, in good careers and jobs, and being financially secure.
2. When a child comes into care, the council becomes the 'Corporate Parent' as the Council assumes some form of parental responsibility. Put simply, the term 'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, officers, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are in the care of the council.

Our vision

We believe that children and young people for whom we are corporate parents are talented, resourceful, articulate and have huge potential. Many will lead successful adult lives. However, we also recognise that often as a result of their early life experiences some will be at greater risk of poor outcomes as they grow up.

Our aim is to create a home and community environment that provides every child and young person with a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to meet their full potential.

The legal context

3. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires the Council to have regard to a set of corporate parenting principles when exercising its functions in relation to looked after children and care leavers (former relevant children). These are:
 - a. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of children and young people;
 - b. To encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
 - c. To take into account of the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people;
 - d. 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;
 - e. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for children and young people;
 - f. For children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
 - g. To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Our broad approach: how do we undertake this role?

4. We discharge these duties primarily through the adoption of a strategy. We are refreshing this strategy as part of this corporate refresh.
5. ***Our family – our strategy for children in, and leaving our care 2018-21*** sets out the basis of our commitment.
6. The Council leads this strategy, but it is a multi-agency commitment, overseen currently by the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP).

The role of the Council

7. We are determined to ensure that the children and young people in our care feel that their needs are given the highest priority and that they are valued and cared about not only by those who look after them on a daily basis but also by those who make decisions, politically, corporately and operationally. This means...
 - That we will work to deliver the priorities in the strategy for children in our care and care leavers, and that we will be open and honest about progress;
 - That we want to do more than deliver strategies, plans and duties – we recognise the many individual and organisational ways in which we can achieve much more;
 - That our elected members will be clear about their roles, and the actions they can take to be good corporate parents;

- That senior officers in the Council will go above and beyond their roles to achieve the best for children and young people in care, using their personal authority and resources to do more.

8. In terms of specific commitments:

- a. We agree and sign a pledge each year, at the first full Council of the new municipal year
- b. We develop ways in which we can go over and above our statutory roles to get the best outcomes
- c. We consider the implications of all our decisions in all our reports to Cabinet
- d. We prioritise the needs of looked after children in all our services, and in everything we commission where appropriate.

9. The commitment to children in our care is further enshrined in priorities in the Council Plan, and in the Children's Services Strategy.

Where we are, and what we could do better

10. There is a lot in place now which enables us to fulfil these roles:

- a. A history of effective working across services and partners
- b. Genuine commitment, drive, passion
- c. Commitment across partners

11. However, there are areas where we could do more:

- a. The regional peer challenge undertaken in October 2017 suggested that although there was a sense of a commitment, there may be some issues of visibility and profile where we could collectively do more to demonstrate our commitment in this area
- b. We have struggled to clearly articulate real and tangible actions which officers and members can take to demonstrate corporate parenting in action – going beyond concepts and enabling action.
- c. Reticence in some areas to develop and deliver practical schemes based on the sense that children in our care should not be considered as 'in need' and so worthy of additional charitable type support
- d. A governance and delivery structure which ensures the involvement of the 'extended family' and which holds agencies to account.

Our proposals

12. The proposals in this paper therefore refer to a system which is not broken, but which could be improved, both in response to the peer challenge, but also based on the views of partners and young people.

13. The proposals include:

- a. Terminology
- b. Strategy
- c. Accountability and profile
- d. Corporate parenting implications of decisions
- e. Training
- f. Awareness and visibility
- g. Helping hands scheme
- h. Care leavers
- i. Corporate offer for foster carers

Terminology

14. There has been considerable national interest in avoiding the unfortunate shorthand of 'LAC' to describe children and young people in care.
15. Locally, the views of children and young people were sought on this issue in late 2016. There is no one specific term which young people prefer, and it is also the case that this issue is of less importance locally than in some other areas.
16. Nevertheless we are settling on the term 'children in our care' to describe children who are technically looked after by the Council. This is a deliberate attempt move away from the use of shorthand phrases such as 'LAC children, 'LAC kids' or simply referring to children in care as 'LAC'.
17. Consideration has also been given to the use of the term 'corporate parenting' which is widely felt to be a remote, cold term with little relation back to the young people it is aimed at. However, this is the legal definition of duties in the Children and Social Work Act 2017, and provides a useful framework to set out our approach. Rather than spend time on seeking an alternative definition or term, we intend, though, to be much more specific about what corporate parenting means in practice.

Strategy

18. The multi-agency strategy for children in our care and care leavers is being refreshed for 2018. This sets out a range of outcome and delivery priorities which fulfil our requirements as part of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, and an ambitious range of commitments to more clearly position our work. **Draft at Annex 1.**

Accountability and governance

19. To respond to the recommendations of the peer challenge, we are proposing to replace the current MALAP with a Corporate Parenting Board as an official committee of the Council.
20. The rationale for this is that the move to a more formal arrangement can provide a more visible level of accountability, and provides the opportunity to refresh terms of reference and membership. It also enables us to refresh the officer working arrangements in support of the Board.

21. Draft terms of reference at Annex 2.

Corporate parenting implications of decisions

22. The Council has, for some time, included corporate parenting implications on Cabinet reports. However, there is a lack of guidance to officers completing reports on what might be considered and documented.

23. Draft new guidance is attached at Annex 3.

Training

24. A guide to corporate parenting has been developed and circulated for members. Training sessions have also been held.
25. Officers awareness has been delivered through the Setting the Standard sessions held in February.

Awareness and visibility

26. In order to maintain the visibility of the refreshed approach, a dedicated space is being developed on the intranet, which will be used as a space for updates and information, both on the strategy and on individual young people as appropriate. In the innovation challenge in 2016, the concept of the 'virtual fridge door' (ie to showcase the work and activity of children) was suggested, and this will be built into the intranet section.

Helping hands scheme

27. The helping hands scheme will be launched in 2018 as a key mechanisms for ensuring that all members and officers in the Council can make a practical contribution if they so choose, building on the example of the Christmas book project in 2017.

28. The proposed scheme is in two parts:

- a. The opportunity to offer time to support children in care. This will be managed through the Talent Network. The principle is that officers may be able to support children in our care through the giving of time – to support an activity, to mentor or to assist in a specific ask from a child or young person in care.
- b. For those who feel less able to give time, there will be an opportunity to give financially towards a specific 'named fund' through a payroll giving mechanism. The fund will be managed by care leavers and will support their activity, be used to sponsor individual young people, and to enable the group to undertake or to fund specific community action. Young people will be trained to be fund administrators by the Tees Valley Community Foundation, who will manage the fund. The options for ensuring there is significant resource immediately available through the transfer of some funding from the Stockton Community Fund, matched by a corporate contribution, and the option for the fund to be one of the incoming mayor's priority charities.

Care Leavers offer

29. In 2018, in line with the requirements of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Council will be co-developing, with care leavers a new care leavers offer. This will include the statutory and discretionary offer in Stockton which is made available to care leavers.

30. This will be developed via the proposed Corporate Parenting Board and reported into the Children and Young People Select Committee in autumn 2018.

31. Stockton-on-Tees was the first authority in the North East to exempt care leavers from council tax until the age of 25, and a range of other existing and potential support mechanisms will be reviewed to ensure care leavers benefit from a wide range of support.

Corporate offer for foster carers

32. As part of wider plans on our approach to children in our care, we will also be reviewing the 'corporate offer' for foster carers as part of a package of measures to recruit and retain foster carers. Note that these are over and above what the Council is required to provide for foster carers through care planning regulations such as the scheme of training, support and allowances, which are also being reviewed as part of the 'children in our care review'

33. The 'corporate offer' is more focused on additional support and benefits which could be provided for foster carers.

34. Amongst the options being considered are:

- a. Priority access to major events
- b. For Council staff....a foster friendly employer scheme, which we could encourage in other partners
- c. Travel passes
- d. Fostering network subscriptions
- e. Access to all other employee benefits and additional potential shopping discount schemes
- f. Council tax exemptions

The Council as the ‘family business’

35. We will increase our efforts to identify suitable opportunities for work experience, internship and employment for children in our care and care leavers.

36. This is the focus of the Employment, Education and Training Sub group of MALAP, but more could be done both to identify opportunities and to identify young people who would benefit from them. A series of ‘roadshows’ will be held with services to explore the opportunities as part of the new approach.

Cabinet Meeting

37. Cabinet considered the matter at its meeting held on 24 May 2018 and a copy of the relevant minute extract is attached to this report.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

38. The proposals in this report set out a new approach to the delivery of corporate parenting priorities. An assessment has been completed.

39. Children in care, and care leavers have been consulted and engaged in the proposals in this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

40. The proposals in this report can be managed within existing resources. Any specific implications associated with an enhanced care leavers offer for example will be considered individually.

41. The costs associated with supporting children in our care are significant and rising, and the proposals in this paper are not linked to work to manage and reduce costs – this is the subject of wider review work which will be brought to cabinet in due course.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

42. The proposals in this report enable the Council to fulfil its duties in the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

RISK ASSESSMENT

43. The risk assessment is considered to be low.

COUNCIL PLAN POLICY PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

44. The proposals in this report are focused on supporting and protecting children in our care and care leavers. These are not only some of our most vulnerable children, but also are a key group for which there are specific statutory duties.

45. The proposals in this report contribute to all of the policy principles:

- Protecting the vulnerable through targeted intervention – the proposals set out how we will continue to engage, consult, and act upon views and wishes of this group of vulnerable children and young people.
- Promoting equality of opportunity through targeted intervention – aspects of the strategy address the need to focus on targeted intervention on health, education and employment opportunities
- Developing strong and healthy communities – we will focus increasingly on the emotional and physical health of children in our care
- Creating economic prosperity – proposals are specifically focused on the opportunities to ensure young people have access to careers advice and support, and the opportunity to remain engaged in education, employment and training.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

46. This report addresses the opportunity to refresh and enhance our corporate parenting role. It includes proposals to engage and involve children on our care and care leavers; to develop our offer of support; to introduce practical ways in which Council members and officers can contribute, and illustrates a high level of ambition and enhanced accountability for delivery to improve outcomes for children in our care, and care leavers.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young people has been consulted.

Members of the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) have been consulted.

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Education related? Yes

Background Papers

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Property

There are no specific direct implications for property. Any implications associated with more specific proposals in the strategy, or the further development of the care leavers offer will be considered separately.