

MINUTE EXTRACT

Cabinet Meeting – 24 May 2018

1. Title of Item/Report

Corporate Parenting - Refreshing Our Approach

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report that proposed a series of measures to further the approach to corporate parenting in Stockton. It included measures to strengthen the accountability of the 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 were clear about their role and had options for how to be further involved if they choose to do so. Most importantly the measures would result in demonstrable outcomes and benefits for children and young people in care.

With regard to the legal context the Children and Social Work Act 2017 required 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 were:

- 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

The role of the Council was that it was determined to ensure that the children and young people in its care felt that their needs were given the highest priority and that they were valued and cared about not only by those who look after them on a daily basis but also by those who made decisions, politically, corporately and operationally. This meant:-

- That the Council would work to deliver the priorities in the strategy for children in its care and care leavers, and that the Council would be open and honest about progress;
- That the Council want to do more than deliver strategies, plans and duties – the Council recognises the many individual and organisational ways in which it can achieve much more;
- That elected members would be clear about their roles, and the actions they can take to be good corporate parents;
- That senior officers in the Council would 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.

In terms of specific commitments:

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

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

The proposals in the report therefore refer to a system which was 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.

The proposals included:

- 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

There had been considerable national interest in avoiding the unfortunate shorthand of 'LAC' to describe children and young people in care.

Locally, the views of children and young people were sought on this issue in late 2016. There was no one specific term which young people prefer, and it was also the case that this issue was of less importance locally than in some other areas.

Nevertheless the Council was settling on the term 'children in our care' to describe children who were technically looked after by the Council. This was 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'.

Consideration had also been given to the use of the term 'corporate parenting' which was widely felt to be a remote, cold term with little relation back to the young people it was aimed at. However, this was the legal definition of duties in the Children and Social Work Act 2017, and provided a useful framework to set out the approach. Rather than spend time on seeking an alternative definition or term, it was intended, though, to be much more specific about what corporate parenting means in practice.

The multi-agency strategy for children in care and care leavers was being refreshed for 2018. This set out a range of outcome and delivery priorities which fulfilled the Council requirements as part of the Children and Social

Work Act 2017, and an ambitious range of commitments to more clearly position our work, this was attached to the report.

To respond to the recommendations of the peer challenge, the Council was proposing to replace MALAP with a Corporate Parenting Board as an official committee of the Council.

The rationale for this was that the move to a more formal arrangement could provide a more visible level of accountability, and provide the opportunity to refresh terms of reference and membership. It also enabled the Council to refresh the officer working arrangements in support of the Board.

The draft terms of reference was attached to the report.

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

The draft new guidance was attached to the report.

A guide to corporate parenting had been developed and circulated for members. Training sessions had also been held.

Officers awareness had been delivered through the Setting the Standard sessions held in February.

In order to maintain the visibility of the refreshed approach, a dedicated space was being developed on the intranet, which would 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 would be built into the intranet section.

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

The proposed scheme was in two parts:

a. The opportunity to offer time to support children in care. This would be managed through the Talent Network. The principle was that officers may be able to support children in 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 would be an opportunity to give financially towards a specific 'named fund' through a payroll giving mechanism. The fund would be managed by care leavers and would 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 would be trained to be fund administrators by the Tees Valley Community Foundation, who would manage the fund. The options for ensuring there was 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.

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

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

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 would be reviewed to ensure care leavers benefit from a wide range of support.

As part of wider plans on the approach to children in care, the Council would 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 were over and above what the Council was required to provide for foster carers through care planning regulations such as the scheme of training, support and allowances, which were also being reviewed as part of the 'children in our care review'

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

Amongst the options being considered were:

- 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'

The Council would increase its efforts to identify suitable opportunities for work experience, internship and employment for children in care and care leavers.

This was 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' would be held with services to explore the opportunities as part of the new approach.

RECOMMENDED to Council that:

1. The proposals in the report be noted.
2. The new strategy be agreed.

3. A Corporate Parenting Board be established that will be politically balanced and consisting of 7 elected Members. .