



Corporate Parenting Board

11 September 2014

Report title	Corporate Parenting Strategy Refresh 2014
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Val Gibson Children and Families
Wards affected	All
Accountable director	Sarah Norman, Community
Originating service	Looked after Children's Service
Accountable employee(s)	Darren Martindale: COPE Team manager / Virtual School Head 01902 551039
Report to be/has been considered by	Emma Bennet & Cllr Gibson

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Approve the proposed work programme for 2014/15.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 To update the council's Corporate Parenting Strategy, which outlines how the council will fulfill its statutory Corporate Parenting Responsibilities.

2.0 Background

2.1 Wolverhampton City Council and its Partners have a legal and moral duty towards all of its Looked after Children and Care-leavers to offer them the kind of support a good parent would provide.¹ The Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines how the council will

¹ Children Act 1989, Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, Every Child Matters 2003 & Children

ensure that we act as good Corporate Parents by ensuring the active engagement of all service departments of Wolverhampton City Council, Elected Members and Partners, at a strategic level. The original strategy was written in 2010 and needed to be updated to take into account various changes, including service restructure, and to reflect on the progress made against previous priorities as well as new and ongoing consultation with service users.

3.0 Progress, options, discussion, etc.

3.1 Wolverhampton City Council Corporate Parenting Council Strategy

Foreword

There are very few responsibilities and duties which are undertaken by the Council and its partners which are more important or pose a greater challenge than that of Corporate Parenting. Wolverhampton City Council takes these duties very seriously and has high aspirations for all of our children who are looked after. We recognise that a whole Council response is required to respond to their need with a coordinated and concerted approach towards developing policies, initiatives, services and budget priorities. In pursuance of this we are encouraged as Councillors, Officers and Partner Agencies to consider the following three questions:

Is this good enough for my child?

Would this have been good enough for me as a child?

Is this the best that we can achieve?

Wolverhampton City Council must work positively with its partner agencies, providing the platforms and levels of excellence to ask all our partners to share our ambitions for Looked after Children. This Corporate Parenting Strategy forms both our statement of intent and vision for the next three years and includes our Pledge to all Looked after Children.

Signed.....
Lead Member for CYP

Signed.....
Director of Children and Young People

Corporate Parenting Strategy Aims

Wolverhampton Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy for Looked after Children demonstrates the Council's commitment to furthering the life chances of every child and young person in its care. It aims to improve their outcomes, narrowing the gap between them and their peers, by providing effective support which enables them to reach their full potential. The overall aim of

the Strategy is to reinforce the corporate responsibility of the whole Council and its partner agencies through commitment to the development of policies, initiatives, services and budget prioritising. This Strategy requires the active engagement of all service departments of Wolverhampton City Council, Elected Members and Partners.

What is Corporate Parenting?

“As the Corporate Parent of children in care we have a special responsibility for their well-being. Like any good parent, it should put its own children first. That means being a powerful advocate for them to receive the best of everything and helping them to make a success of their lives²” (DFES 2006)

The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced by the Government in 1998 as part of a drive to improve the lives of children who are looked after by the local authority. The Corporate Parenting responsibility was reiterated and reinforced in 2007 with the release of the White Paper Care Matters-Time for Change and the underpinning legislation, Children and Young People Act 2008.

Wolverhampton City Council and its Partners have a legal and moral duty towards all of its Looked after Children and Care-leavers to offer them the kind of support a good parent would provide. Importantly, Wolverhampton City Council's Corporate Parenting responsibility can not be implemented by services targeted at children alone. It emphasises the collective responsibility of the Local Authority to achieve good parenting including services such as housing, regeneration and leisure. It is also important to note that every elected member of the Council has the specific responsibility of acting as a corporate parent.

Corporate Parenting is different from ‘ordinary’ parenting, in that the focus is not necessarily on forming personal relationships with individual children. Corporate Parenting is about prioritising and championing Looked after Children and this will look very different in different areas of the authority. Below are examples of what Corporate Parenting could look like across Wolverhampton City Council.

- Communications & PR: Prioritising news stories about Looked after Children which help to breakdown stigma of what a Looked after Child is both in the authority and also with the wider public.
- Library services: Provide all Looked after Children with their own library card when they come into care which can follow them around their placements.
- Planning: Consideration of Corporate Parenting responsibilities when a new children’s home is being proposed.
- Procurement: Building into all contracts that any companies working for WCC or Partners that they will offer Work Experience to Looked after Children or prioritise Care Leavers in apprenticeship roles.
- Culture & Leisure Services: To offer specific initiatives to Looked after Children and carers, including free or discounted entrance to venues such as theatres, art galleries, swimming pools etc.
- Housing: A designated link in housing for fostering services.
- ICT Services: Offer ICT support sessions to Looked after Children and their carers.

² Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice, NCB 2008

What is the role of our Partners

Whilst this is a Wolverhampton City Council Strategy it is vital that we recognise the importance of our Partners in the statutory, private and third sector. Wolverhampton City Council alone can not meet the needs of Looked after Children and Care Leavers and needs to work effectively with partners to demonstrate our Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Whilst this strategy is a Wolverhampton City Council document it is hoped that it will be adopted by our Partners and the resultant Action Plan is held across all the sectors.

Who are our Looked after Children?

As Corporate Parents it is important for everyone to have a clear and accurate picture of who our Looked after Children are in order to be able to plan and commission services to best meet their needs. At 31 March 2014:

- 783 children are being looked after by the Local Authority (a rate of 139 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 660 (119 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2013; equivalent to an 18.6% increase.
- 58 (8%) live in residential children's homes, of whom approximately 43% live out of the authority area.
- 3 live in residential special schools, all of whom live out of the authority area.
- 547 (79%) live with foster families, of whom 70.8% live out of the authority area.
- 55 children live with parents or persons with parental responsibility.
- 3 children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- 106 (13.5%) of looked after children have a decision that they should be adopted; with 32 (30%) of those children currently being placed with their adoptive parents.
- 51% of LAC are in placements that are outside of Wolverhampton

The term 'looked after' is applied to any child whom the Authority is providing accommodation for where they are subject to care orders (Section 31) or where children are accommodated through a voluntary agreement and parents consent.(Section 20). Disabled children who receive a regular series of short breaks are also classed as looked after for those periods of time when they are in their short break accommodation. This strategy refers to all children and young people looked after by Wolverhampton City Council regardless of the route taken in to care and their legal status.

Looked after Children are recognised as among the most vulnerable children in our society. Children become looked after for a wide range of reasons, many will have been affected by distressing and traumatic life experiences including physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect. Some may come into care because of the illness or death of a parent, others may have a disability or complex needs. It is important to note that only a tiny minority of the children looked after is because of their anti-social or offending behaviour, the figure is approximately 2% nationally³ (DCSF).

It is also important to note that disabled children and those from some ethnic minorities are often over-represented in the care system. As a result of their experiences and coming into the care system, children may experience disrupted education and multiple care placements; they may have difficulties with their social and emotional well being and lack stable relationships in their life. However placement stability is improving in Wolverhampton: 12% of Wolverhampton's LAC have had 3 placements or more, which is an improvement of 25% for 2012/13.

It is important that we recognise that as Corporate Parents we have a responsibility to our care leavers too. In February 2014 42% of carer leavers were in education, employment or training between three months before and one month after their 19th birthday. Again this has improved since 2012/13, for which the outturn was 30%.

Service Restructure

Against this backdrop, the Council faces a significant budgetary challenge: the latest forecasts are that spending as a whole must be reduced by as much as £123.0 million over the medium term period 2014/15 to 2018/19. The Community Directorate is already committed to savings targets with a value of £36.2 million over the the medium term period 2014/15 to 2018/19, and will need to make even further savings if the Council is to reduce its growing budget deficit.

In the face of the financial pressures of our rising Looked After Children (LAC) numbers, the Council has committed substantial Invest to Save financial resources to its Children in Need/Child Protection (CIN/CP) and LAC services to meet additional placement costs, reduce caseloads and undertake targeted intervention work with families to prevent children coming into care.

The restructuring of Children's Services and the introduction of the New Operating Model (NOM) from April 2014 involves several strands of substantial organisational change. These are being carefully managed. It is hoped the developments in co-ordinated integrated working and emphasis on early intervention that characterise the NOM will enable substantial long term savings to be made as well as bringing about an improvement in the quality and efficiency of help available to vulnerable families when and where they need it.

Key Legislation & Local Policies

- Children Act 1989
- Quality Protects 1998
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

- Every Child Matters 2003 & Children Act 2004
- Care Matters 2007 & Children Act 2008 –
- Wolverhampton City Council Corporate Parenting Policy 2007
- Integrated Placement Strategy, Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked after Children 2010.
- Statutory guidance on promoting the educational achievement of looked after children - Department for Education 2014
- In 2014, Wolverhampton will publish its Children, Young People and Families Plan (2014 – 24): the 10 year framework gives scope to improve the health, well-being and cohesiveness of families and the vision is ‘Healthy, Happy Families’: The four priorities are to:
 1. Reduce the harm caused by child poverty
 2. Increase achievement and involvement in education, training and employment
 3. Make families stronger (LAC/Toxic Trio)
 4. Improve the health of CYP and their families (infant mortality/childhood obesity/Toxic Trio)
- Looked after Children Service Action Plan 2014
- CAMHS strategy for Looked after Children

Elected Members and Governance

Elected Members have a specific responsibility for children and young people who are looked after. The DFES in 2003 published guidance for all councillors about how to be a good corporate parent, *If This Were My Child*⁴ states:

- Councillors have a clear responsibility to ensure that the services being provided to children in their care are of the highest quality.
- Councillors have no greater responsibility than when they act as corporate parent.
- Councillors’ role is crucial not just in drawing up policies, but in setting standards and seeing that they are met.
- Councillors should be involved in the setting of a vision and strategic objectives for looked after children and young people.

While all Members have a duty to ensure that the Council fulfils its responsibilities to its Looked after Children, Members who are appointed to the Corporate Parenting Panel have a specific responsibility to oversee this area of Council responsibilities. In Wolverhampton City Council the Lead Member for Children and Young People chairs the cross-party Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP), the chair of the local Foster Care Association and two members of the Children in Care Council also sit on this panel. The CPP is currently a

regulatory panel with scrutiny being carried out by the Children and Young people Scrutiny panel.

Officers from across Wolverhampton City Council and its Partner Agencies are represented and held accountable at a senior level through the Corporate Parenting Strategic Officers Group. This Group has a responsibility for leadership, vision and implementation of the strategy. Themed Corporate Parenting Operational Officers Groups will be formed to move forward the action plan resulting from this strategy. The Children in Care Council will have responsibility for monitoring the Young Person's action plan that results from this Strategy and are consulted on each of the key service area reports on LAC, providing a response to accompany each report so that the views LAC are captured as well as those of elected members at CPP meetings (this is a new initiative for 2014).

The participation of Looked after Children in Corporate Parenting

It is essential that the voices of Looked after Children are heard and considered in the shaping of services that support them. Planning how to meet the needs of Looked after Children has to be an endeavour based upon their full and active engagement and participation both on an individual and group basis

Wolverhampton City Council has a robust Children in Care Council which meets regularly and considers Council and Partner developments and offers an accessible reference group. The Participation Officer and Assistant Corporate Parenting Officer, who was the former Chair of the Children in Care Council, are driving forward developments. These include plans to create sub groups to meet the wider needs of the population including those with a disability, younger LAC and asylum seeker young people. Young people from the Children in Care Council attend certain Corporate Parenting Panel meetings and therefore have a direct link with the Elected Members. The plan for 2014/15 is that the new chair of the Children in Care Council will sit on Wolverhampton's Council wider Youth Council to ensure Looked after Children's views are represented. Feedback and evaluation of the from 150 children and young people during 2013/14

Progress to Date (July 2014)

Corporate Parenting Strategic Priorities 2011-2013

The 2011-13 strategy was informed by consultation with a group of Looked after Children aged between 11-17 years from a variety of different placement types. Four key priorities were identified, relating to both Looked after Children and Care Leavers and actions were developed to address these priorities

Priority One

"Have services understand us better."

Progress to date:

- Total Respect Training has been delivered to 110 council employees within CYP&F in 2014, including staff from operational to senior management level. In addition, staff from 50 external providers have been trained and another 20 are booked onto courses in the near

future. This is still a priority however; Total Respect needs to continue to be rolled out to a wider audience, to include schools (see consultation below) and the training itself needs to be updated. This is addressed in the 2014/15 LAC Participation Work Plan.

- Since commencing in post the Designated Senior Nurse has raised the profile of LAC within Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group (WCCG) in order to raise the awareness of the needs of LAC in order to ensure appropriate provision of services.
- The Virtual School Head (VSH) provides regular training to designated teachers on the needs of LAC and is also working closely with Ofsted Lead Inspectors to raise their awareness; a presentation on LAC was delivered at the Ofsted regional meeting in June 2014.

Priority Two

“Focus on the positive things we do”

Progress to date:

- The LAC awards ceremony has been a very successful annual event. Planning is currently underway for the 2015 ceremony. This remains a priority and we will continue to find new and creative ways to recognise and celebrate our young people. For example the Virtual School Head will be introducing awards for excellent school attendance in the 2014/15 academic year.

Priority Three

“Help us to make achievements”

Progress to date:

- While LAC still underachieve significantly in comparison with their peers and therefore this area is still a priority, achievement is showing significant improvement:
 - 24% of all Wolverhampton LAC achieved 5+ GCSEs at grades A-C including maths and English in 2013 – a major improvement on previous years
 - English and maths levels have improved at all other key assessment stages (Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2) between 2010 and 2014
 - Levels of progress have improved significantly, for instance at KS2: 100% of LAC in Wolverhampton schools made the expected level of progress in reading in 2014 compared to 77.8% in 2010 while writing improved by 22.5% and maths by 44.7%

The introduction of the now statutory role of the Virtual School head (VSH) and Pupil Premium + for LAC will help to ensure that the best available educational support is provided to all LAC of statutory school age in a timely manner. Social workers must now consult with the VSH prior to any change to a school placement for a Looked after Child, which should improve educational stability, and PEP forms for pre-school and post-16 age eanges will be introduced in the 2014/15 academic year. The relevant council policies have been updated to reflect these and other changes.

“Help us to spend time with children who aren’t in care”

- This remains a priority and an area for further action

Priority Four

“Keep siblings together & give us more contact with siblings.”

“Let us make choices about school.”

“Give us more information and support about sexual health.”

Progress to date:

- Siblings are kept together wherever possible, however this is still an issue to be addressed
- This has been addressed through increased participation in LAC reviews and an increasing focus on the quality of PEP meetings. The participation of LAC in their PEP meetings remains an area for further improvement, however the views of LAC are considered as carefully as possible when choosing schools and the increased involvement of the VSH in changes of school placement will help to strengthen this further
- The Designated Senior Nurse for LAC has reported increased engagement of LAC and Care Leavers with sexual health services to support their sexual health and relationship needs and reduced conception rates regarding LAC and Care Leavers under 18yrs.

Corporate Parenting Strategic Priorities 2014-16

In 2014 The Children in Care Council (CiCC) were consulted on whether the above priorities, as reflected in both the previous strategy and the council’s Pledge to LAC and Care Leavers, were still current and whether there were new or additional issues which needed to be prioritised. The CiCC felt that both needed to be updated, highlighting the following issues in the areas of education, Total Respect Training and leaving care:

“Review the age for apprenticeships and try to make them available for care leavers beyond 18”

“Promote Total Respect to other Corporate Parents and look at the possibility of teachers attending the training.”

“Make work placements and apprenticeships more appropriate for Looked after Children”

“Promote independent skills from an early age and ensure that foster carers and residential staff are equipped with the correct training regarding independence.”

“Develop an independence programme/Leaving Care pack with the help of Looked after Children and Care Leavers”

“Ensure that Young People leave care with a good understanding of their life history and support those who need help with finding help with their birth families.”

“Provide ongoing support for Young People who need it and review the Leaving Care Charter.”

It is clear from both the outcomes described above previous priorities should remain as Corporate Parenting Strategic priorities for 2014-16, as there is still progress to be made in these areas, despite some notable successes. However it is also evident from recent consultation that additional focus is required in two priority areas:

- Maximise access to work experience and apprenticeship opportunities for LAC and Care Leavers

- Strengthen care leavers' preparation for independence, teaching independence skills from an earlier age and increasing access to life story work

Following the planned recruitment of a new Corporate Parenting Officer in the Autumn of 2014, a new Corporate Parenting Action Plan will be created to outline how the council and its partners will respond to the above strategic priorities. With a focussed action plan for 2014-16 we will continue to move forward, despite the considerable challenges faced by Wolverhampton and all local authorities, in our role as a Corporate Parents.

4.0 Financial implications

4.1 This report has no financial implications.

[NM/03092014/G]

5.0 Legal implications

5.1 The relevant legislation is set out in the body of this report. There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report. RB/03092014/H

6.0 Equalities implications

6.1 This plan aims to significantly improve equality of opportunity for LAC, who are a very disadvantaged group. No other groups will experience any loss of opportunity as a result of this plan, and mechanisms for impact assessment are built in to the processes described.

7.0 Environmental implications

7.1 There are no environmental implications

8.0 Human resources implications

8.1 All of the proposed developments can be made within existing resources

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

9.1 There are no corporate landlord implications

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.1 There are no background papers