

Corporate Parenting Pledges

Executive Summary

Walsall Council has corporate parenting responsibility towards children cared for and young people leaving care from age 0 to 25 years. Those responsibilities include the necessity to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded from harm, have a safe place to live, enjoy education, training and employment with high aspirations for their futures, are healthy and are cared for in ways in which any good parent would for their own child.

Walsall Council has corporate responsibilities for 683 children (October 2020) currently in our care and offer support, advice and guidance to a further 287 of care experienced young people up to the age of 25 whom were formally in our care.

Walsall Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017 to 2020, sets out the vision and plans for fulfilling the ambitions and corporate parenting responsibilities to all our children and young people in care and care leavers. The strategy was informed by the Pledges that were collectively made by the Council and our Partners in 2017.

This report sets out the final plans for Walsall's Corporate Parenting Pledges.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board

To update the Board on the final pledges and agree the same.

Recommendations

To discuss and review the Corporate Parenting Pledges that have now been drafted.

Background papers:

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017-2020.

Resource and legal considerations

Corporate parenting responsibilities for Children in Care and Care leaver sit with the Local Authority and its partners and are enshrined in legislation. (Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 imposes a duty on local authorities to 'safeguard and promote the welfare of each child they look after').

In 2017 the Children and Social Work Act introduced a set of Corporate Parenting Principles for children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25 years. Walsall Council and our partners believe adherence to these principles is the key to ensuring we deliver good outcomes for our children and young people in care and care leavers.

In order to thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. The Corporate Parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to children and young people in care, as follows:

- Act in the best interests of, and to promote the health and wellbeing of children and young people;
- Encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- Take account of a child or young person's views, wishes and feelings;
- Help children and young people to gain access to and get the best use of the services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- Promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for children and young people;
- Children and young people to be safe and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
- Prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Shaped by these principles and our approach, our mission is to give our children in care and care leavers the best start in life through effective safeguarding, high quality health and wellbeing support, and support to aspire and achieve.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities

- Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.
- People have increased independence, improved health, and can positively contribute to their communities.
- Communities are prospering and resilient with all housing needs met in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.

Citizen impact

Looked after children and care leavers are citizens of Walsall and as Corporate Parents we have a duty to look after them as we would our own children and prepare them for adulthood so they can fulfil their potential and play a full and rewarding part in their communities.

Environmental impact

None

Performance management

Corporate Parenting Board ensures everyone works together to fulfil the corporate parenting role and to hold each other to account for making this happen.

- it acts as the visible organisational champion for looked after children and young people and care leavers, promoting their rights, entitlements and aspirations;
- the mobilisation and optimum use of resources available to get the best chance of success for children in care and to support care leavers to positively transition to adulthood and independence.

Reducing inequalities


The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the response to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and families. By being effective Corporate Parents for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, we collectively seek to redress the disadvantage that looked after children and care leavers face.

Consultation

The Corporate Parenting Strategy and Pledges have been co-produced with our cared for children and care leavers. The review and revision of the Pledges has also been co-produced with the involvement of the Children in Care Council and wider partners in setting the priorities going forward.


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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe our collective responsibility to ensure the best outcomes for children that are in, or have been in the care of Walsall Council. Corporate parenting is one of the most important responsibilities held by elected members, partner agencies, and individual staff working with children and young people in the care of the local authority, therefore it is critical that we get this right. Their experiences in early childhood through to their teenage years will shape their future happiness and set the foundations for what they can achieve throughout their adult lives. Children in care and Care Leavers are amongst the most vulnerable children and young people in our borough and as corporate parents, it is our role to ensure that they are safe, happy, and given every opportunity to achieve their full potential.
- 1.2 This is a progress update on the multi-agency consultation process including the workshops completed with the CICC, Practitioners and the Pledge event held earlier this year. The redesign of the Corporate Parenting Pledges are a way to give our children and young people a voice and the opportunity to identify what is important to them in order to influence their own care as part of our service delivery.
- 1.3 As outlined in previous reports, a consultation process has taken place with representatives from Education, Health, Housing and Police as well as the Children in Care Council. Overall a total of 28 Children in Care and Care Leavers have been part of the workshops/consultations. In addition to this, 103 responses to the latest Children in Care Survey was completed and received, the data of which has also fed into the overall actions arising from the children's views.
- 1.4 As a result of the above, the pledges that need to be updated/replaced have been identified and a draft design has now been created for the Corporate Parenting Board to consider.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Walsall Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017 to 2020, sets out the vision and plans for fulfilling the ambitions and corporate parenting responsibilities to all our children and young people in care and care leavers. The strategy was informed by the Pledges that were collectively made by the Council and its partners in 2017. Our current Corporate Parenting Pledges consists of 17 separate pledges and are not age specific. (See Appendix 1).
- 2.2 Historically, there has not been a separate set of pledges that exist in Walsall for younger children and those that are more focused on the issues pertinent to older children and those that are heading towards care leavers status. As such, and given that the pledges were outlined up until 2020, a plan to review them was put into place.
- 2.3 Walsall's Pledges to Children in Care and Care Leavers have now been reviewed. The Pledge sets out our commitment to making sure these children and young people

receive the same care we would want for our own. The contents of the Pledge reflect our specific priorities and what young people themselves have said is important to them, above and beyond the services we are required to provide by statute. They can be used as a checklist by young people themselves to record how well they think we are doing what we should, and where we are falling short. Each promise will have an allocated lead officer responsible for making sure it is kept, and all of our team members and partners are expected to make sure their work with children in care and care leavers helps to fulfil that Pledge.

- 2.4 A cross directorate focus group was tasked with reviewing the effectiveness of our current pledges and whether they reflect the current needs of the children in our care and our care experienced young people. Research was conducted by looking at what other local authorities were or have done, and how they have included their children and young people in the overall design of their pledge. The need to engage and consult with our Children in Care Council was crucial and as such a separate consultation session with them was held as well as consultation with staff and partner agencies. The work conducted around that time has been presented in previous reports and as such does not need to be reiterated here.
- 2.5 Shortly prior to lockdown on the 17th February 2020, a workshop including our children in care, care experienced young people and professionals from all key agencies was held to bring together some of the previous work and share ideas from across agencies. Following on from the consultation with the CICC, the groups were set out into themes with representatives from each agency (Health, Education, Police, Housing) which were able to engage with the children/young people as to what they felt was the most important promises to be made.
- 2.6 The key themes included the following 4 main areas:
- **Keeping you healthy** - focussing on health and emotional wellbeing.
 - **Keeping you safe** – focussing on safety in and out of the home and included online safety and housing and community support.
 - **Education and Training** – focussing on educational needs for all ages and further education and training opportunities for care leavers.
 - **Keeping in touch** – focussing on family time and ensuring that children and young people do not feel alone and isolated from professionals and those important to them.
- 2.7 These four main themes have been the centre of developing the new pledges and are the main headings in which we have chosen to set our pledges against. By refreshing the current pledges, the aim is to strengthen multi-agency working to ensure the holistic needs of children in our care and care experienced young people are routinely

met. This also feeds into other areas of work that are currently underway in relation to Housing, Health and the review of the Local Offer to Care Leavers and the update of the current Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017 – 2020.

As outlined within my previous report, a general consensus was reached in regards to the following:

1. The need to refer to them as 'promises' rather than pledges
2. The current 17 pledges remain relevant but need to be aged related for children and young people aged 5 to 11 years, 12 to 15 years and 16 to 25 years.
3. They need to be accessible in child and young person friendly statements across the four areas set in paragraph 2.6
4. That the new pledges are measurable and reviewed
5. That the pledges should be at the centre of the work of the Children in Care Council and inform their work plan, our services plans and be used as an improvement monitoring tool.
6. Young people should continue to be fully involved in any further review of the pledges.
7. Pledge monitoring form is developed and this can be used by young people to feedback how well the authority is delivering on its promises. This will be developed with our children and young people as part of future CICC meetings.
8. It is also proposed that we developed the use of Challenge Cards. Young people can complete Challenge Cards that are sent to the Children in Care Council then the Corporate Parenting Board. These allow young people to challenge corporate parents about issues they face being in care. Corporate parents can then respond to the challenges, to the young person and the Children in Care Council. This has recently been undertaken with the use of a Q & A session held as part of the shadow board on the 14th October 2020 and should be incorporated into future meetings.

3.0 Update

- 3.1 As previously outlined, whilst most our children and young people felt that the current pledges remained largely relevant, the format and wording was something that they wished to see change. Overwhelmingly, our children and young people felt that separate pledges relating to different age ranges was preferable and that the design of these should fit in with the audience for which they are meant to target. As such, a

common themed presentation of three separate pledges has been drafted using the wording that was agreed in consultation with our children and young people.

- 3.2 As we know from the consultation process, the children preferred to use the term **'Promise'** rather than pledge as they felt that this would be easier to understand, particularly for the younger children. The children and young people also suggested the need to identify 'smaller promises' such as keeping the same social worker whenever possible so that they could build a relationship and have someone they can confide in. Some of these issues appeared more important to the children and young people as opposed to some of the more generic pledges. As such, whilst being mindful as to how these are worded, some of these have been incorporated into the new drafts that have been designed and can be found as appendices attached to this report.
- 3.3 As a result of the work undertaken, a draft set of 'Promises' have been designed within the three sets of age ranges previously agreed. These have been formatted using the four key areas and a number of promises are then identified underneath each section. These are in digital draft only at this stage and are open to suggest changes before final versions are agreed. Within each of the three designs, a short summary has been written to explain the purpose of the pledges in a style in which each of the age ranges should be able to understand.

4.0 **Recommendations**

- 4.1 The draft designs are now ready for final consultation with our partners, children and young people. They have been designed in poster format so that they can be printed and displayed within office bases, the main function is for them to form part of the children in care and care leaver's website. It is our intention that as part of the website design, useful links and information to other agencies such as health and housing would be embedded into the website for children in care and care leavers. In addition to this, welcome packs will be developed aimed at specific groups/ages such as 5-11 pack 12-16 pack, leaving care, packs for young people with disabilities and for asylum seeking and refugee young people. All of which should be can be accessed online and needs to be completed in consultation with managers/practitioners with expertise in those areas.
- 4.2 As a way of measuring the success of the new pledges we propose the development of a 'show me that I matter survey' that asks questions about the pledges and whether we are delivering on them. This could be integrated into the current survey format but again this should be made available in digital form so that the children and young people are able to access this more effectively. A Participation Strategy Working Group has now been developed and aims to increase the focus of participation across the services.

Appendix 1 – Current Pledges

Our Pledge to Looked After Children

Your Education

1. We will do everything we can to make sure you have the very best education and training possible.
2. You will be supported in taking up opportunities for further education and apprenticeships.

Your Health

3. We will do everything we can to make sure that your health is regularly checked and your health needs are addressed.
4. We will support you to maintain and improve your health and wellbeing.

A Good and Safe Place to Live

5. We will do all that we can to make sure you have a home where you feel safe, happy and healthy and where you feel well cared for and supported. We will make sure your carers have access to the support they need to make this happen for you.

Things to do

6. We will make sure you have the opportunity to take part in sporting activities, youth clubs and other social activities without facing obstacles.
7. Your passport application will be treated as a priority especially where you live in a long term placement.

Your Voice.....Your Influence

8. We will make sure you have chances to share your views, wishes and feelings. We promise to listen to you and tell you how your views and feelings are taken into account in making plans.
9. We will make sure you know what your rights are on a regular basis and information will be shared with you in a child friendly manner.
10. Contact with people who are important to you will be actively promoted and arrangements will clearly take into account your wishes and feelings.
11. We will support the Respect group to make sure that looked after children in Walsall have their voices heard. Members of the corporate parenting board will meet with children and young people at least four times a year.

Our Pledge to Care Leavers

In keeping with the vision outlined in 'Keep on Caring' (July 2016) we will improve the transition into adulthood so that all young people leaving care are better prepared and supported to live independently.

12. We will improve access to education, employment and training and help you with your career plans
 13. We will help you to experience stability in your lives, and feel safe and secure, including help to find and keep a stable place to live
 14. We will provide improved access to health support, and go to medical appointments with you if you are worried to go alone
 15. We will help you learn about budgeting and what bills to pay to help achievement of financial stability.
 16. We will respect you as individuals, not judge you on the past, and we will believe in your future
- We will listen to you, hear what you say and spend some time with you away from the office

Appendix 2 – Proposed new Pledges using the term ‘Promises’

These can be found as separate attachments to this report.