

<b>Corporate Parenting Board</b> <b>7 January 2020</b>	<b>Agenda Item No.</b>
<b>Title of the Report:</b> Corporate Parenting Pledge Refresh	
<p><b>Executive Summary</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>We have parental responsibilities for 643 (November 2019) children who are in our care and offer support, advice, and guidance to 244 care leavers (November 2019) up to the age of 25, who were formerly in our care.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>This report sets out the action plan in progress to review and refresh the Pledges that the Corporate Parenting Strategy identified in 2017.</p>	
<p><b>Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board</b></p> <p>The Walsall Corporate Pledges currently consists of 17 separate pledges and are generic in terms of age range. There is not currently 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 is now in place.</p>	
<p><b>Recommendation:</b></p> <p>It is recommended that the Board note the work in progress to refresh Our Pledges, and have the opportunity to comment activity.</p>	
<p><b>Background papers:</b></p> <p>Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017-2020.</p>	
<p><b>Resource and legal considerations</b></p> <p>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').</p>	

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**

There is no environmental impact

## **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 and collectively seek to redress the disadvantage that looked after children and care leavers face.

## **Consultation**

The Corporate Parenting Strategy and Pledges have been coproduced with our cared for children and care leavers in 2017. The appointment of Child and Family Support Worker to work alongside our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young people will ensure wider inclusivity, participation and focus on the specific issues relating to them, including immigration issues, housing, health and education.

It is important that as part of the plan to refresh the Corporate Parenting Pledges that we seek to encourage engagement and support those from the most marginalised groups within society.

The review and revision of the Pledges will be co-produced with the involvement of the Children in Care Council and wider partners in setting the priorities going forward.

## **Contact Officers**

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## Report

### 1.0 Background

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017 - 2020 and articulates the aspirations we hold for our looked after children and young people leaving care; our Pledges (Promises) to them over the timeframe of the strategy, and describes how we will achieve them.

#### 1.1 In 2017 the Corporate Parenting Board agreed to the following priorities:

1. Strengthen the corporate parenting role including support and develop our Council 4Kids and New Belongings group.
2. Make sure all looked after children are listened to so their views can help plan what we do and make it better.
3. Improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people being looked after and care leavers.
4. Ensure looked after children and care leavers are safe in their home and in their community and are cared for close to Walsall, that they have suitable accommodation whilst in our care, and in line with their best interests, move quickly to a permanent home.
5. Improve education and improve access to work, education and training.

#### 1.2 The Pledges agreed in 2017 (see Appendix 1) have underpinned how services are delivered to children in care and young people leaving care and over the last three years their voices have influenced services. The Pledges need to be reviewed with Children and Young People to ensure that they are relevant and purposeful.

#### 1.3 A task and finish group was set up in November 2019 and has met fortnightly to formulate and progress key activities and engagement with children and young people to review our Pledges with children and Young People. The group is chaired Group Manager for Corporate Parenting Service and includes representation from colleagues from Virtual School, Health and Housing.

A co-production workshop with the Children in Care Council, elected members, our carers, children's services staff and colleagues in Health, Housing and Education providers will take place in February half-term 2020.

#### 1.4 The group has a schedule of activities which will involve children and young people in as many forums as possible; services and staff across the partners and the wider council and apply best practice and learning from other areas. To date, we have held 4 meetings with invites having been sent to key professionals from Health, Housing and Education. These meetings have largely focussed on how we include children and young people in reviewing the pledges and securing commitment from other partners and agencies with regards to the new pledges will look like.

- 1.5 Our plan is to hold an event on the 17 February at the EDC. We have started to discuss potential participants through Virtual School, Partner agencies, wider Council services, Health and Children's Services as to who should be involved and what the focus of this event should be.

We plan to hold inter active workshops throughout the day involving input from Arts Connect, Floetry and theatre groups. This will provide the children and young people with a conduit in which they can express what the pledges mean to them and what issues they see as the most important promises that agencies should make.

Prior to the event, a series of smaller sessions will be held with children and young people, including the Children in Care Council, our internal residential providers and other professionals and foster carers to develop some of the key pledges which will become the main focus of the event.

- 1.6 We will have children's participation champions from across the services meeting in January 2020 as there is a need to widen the scope of participation beyond that of the role of the Children's Champion. Work is underway to develop marketing material that will be shared with our children and young people in order to widen the group that is actively involved in participation. There is a recognition that we need to be better at reaching those that do not understand or have knowledge of what their involvement could/should be.
- 1.6 In summary, planning for a co-production workshop is underway and will be scheduled in February 2020 with children and young people and services and this will inform our Pledges from 2020 to 2023.

A further report setting out the outcome of the day and Our Pledges to children and young people will be provided to the Corporate Parenting Board in April 2020 for their approval.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Pledge to Children in Care:**

#### **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.

### **Current Pledge Young People leaving care are:**

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

17. We will listen to you, hear what you say and spend some time with you away from the office