

**Title of the Report:**

Corporate Parenting Pledge Refresh

**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 692 children (June 2020) currently in our care and offer support, advice and guidance to a further 284 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 review of the Pledges undertaken in February 2020.

**Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board**

To update the Board on the review of the Pledges and agree the proposed pledges.

**Recommendations**

To note the progress of the work being undertaken in regards to the review of our Corporate Parenting Pledges.

**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 coproduced with our cared for children and care leavers in 2017. 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.

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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 in the care of Walsall Council, and those young people who have left our care. 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 on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2020. 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 Meetings/consultations have now 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 recent Children in Care Survey were 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 plan in regards to how these are formatted and designed now needs to be undertaken. This would have been completed sooner but the issues that have arisen in light of Covid-19 has meant that the launch of the refreshed pledges has unfortunately been delayed.

## **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 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 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 as part of this process was undertaken on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020.
- 2.5 A consultation with practitioners was held on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2020. This was held at the EDC and formed part of the Corporate Parenting Development Day. Staff from Corporate Parenting were asked to discuss their roles in ensuring the pledges are fulfilled and what changes they feel need to be applied. Again, examples of pledges from other Local Authorities were used to form a benchmark of good examples and to aid discussions on what may be pertinent to the children and young people in the care of Walsall
- 2.6 On the 17<sup>th</sup> 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.
- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 This workshop was a whole day event and included input from the all relevant partners and agencies. Using the four key areas above, each agency was tasked with setting up 'stalls' so that key issues relating to their agencies could be discussed and a list of key pledges be agreed. This allowed for all of the children and young people involved to have their say in regards to each area and how it would impact upon their lives. Along with these consultation sessions, there was a theatre group that assisted the children and young people in expressing their views in relation to the current pledges and how/what they feel needed to be changed.
- 3.0 **Overall findings**
- 3.1 Whilst most of the children/young people consulted agreed with the current 17 pledges remain relevant and they want these to be presented in a better format and to be

shorter and easier for them to read. For example, under the 4 main key areas, there was a number of ideas shared about how the pledges should be worded and presented and whether these should be broken down into separate age ranges. 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.

- 3.2 Equally, 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. Amongst the examples that were used as part of the consultation process and as part of the workshop event, the children and young people were clearly drawn towards the 'poster style' documents that had incorporated artwork from the children themselves.
- 3.3 One of the main issues that many of our children and young people raised was the need for what we ultimately termed as 'smaller promises'. This included issues such as keeping the same social worker whenever possible, spending time with their social worker out of their home and providing them with greater opportunities to meet with other children in our care.
- 3.4 What was evident as part of these discussions was how generic pledges such as '*we will do everything we can to make sure that your health is regularly checked and your health needs are addressed*', whilst important corporate parenting principles, do not necessarily mean much to the children themselves. This led to a number of conversations across the groups as to how important pledges such as health and wellbeing are incorporated into the new pledges but are done so in such a way that they understand and adds value for them. Again, as part of the research in developing our new pledges, we have seen many examples of how this has been done effectively in other areas.
- 3.5 As with all children in consultation with their parents, issues such as more pocket money, having a new phone etc were all raised as part of these consultations. That being said, whilst jovial and less serious conversations were all part of the fun, I was impressed by how committed our children and young people have been and the value that they have added to this process. They have been clear in what they feel is important to them, not just as individuals, but as a community that they all feel like they belong.
- 3.6 Alongside the discussions about what the new pledges should look like and contain, the children and young people were asked to comment on how they feel they should be reviewed and what processes are needed if they feel promises are not being kept. There was a number of ideas identified by them and the professionals consulted with. See Appendix 2

#### 4.0 **Recommendations**

- 4.1 By refreshing the current pledges, we aim to strengthen multi-agency working to ensure the holistic needs of children in our care are routinely met. The events/consultations with children and young people as well as the professionals that work, a general consensus was reached.

1. They need to be 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 10 years, 11 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 2.7
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 as an improvement monitoring tool.
6. Young people should continue to be fully involved in any 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
8. Develop a rating system against the pledge, the outcome of which could be used to further develop practice.
9. 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.

5.2 We are now at the stage whereby we can design and develop our new pledges. As part of this, we will need to work closely with colleagues in other areas of the council so that draft designs can be completed ready for final consultation with our partners and children and young people.

## 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 – Examples from children, young people and professionals**

For our younger children, we should use simple language with colourful and child friendly presentation. Some of the suggestions from our children and young people included:

- We will help you to have a say in what is happening to you.
- We will tell you what is happening using words or pictures.
- We will help you to join in.
- We will listen to what you like and don't like
- We will help you to stay in a safe place and be healthy and happy.
- We will help you to play and learn.
- We will help you to go to a nursery or pre-school and one that is right for you.
- We will help you when you are doing well or if you are struggling and unhappy.
- We will help you to make friends.
- We will help you join in school clubs or clubs where you live
- We will tell you when you are doing well.
- We will show you how proud we are of you.
- We will only tell people things about you when we have to
- We will help you stay in touch with your family if this is what you want.
- We will help you stay in touch with Foster Carers and friends if you want to and will tell you if this can't happen
- We will keep a story of your life so you can look at it.

For our older children, some of the suggestions from our children and young people included:

- We will keep you safe and help you to keep yourself safe
- We will involve you in decisions that affect your life.
- We will support you to have different experiences and access to activities that may interest you.
- We will help you to keep in contact with your family, friends and those that you feel are important to you.
- We will help you with your future
- We will help you decide where you want to live
- We will help you with your education and employment

In regards to the older children and young people, they felt that the examples above could be used as main headings and then further information could be added to each section. They also felt that this should be available to them as a web page specifically designed for them to use.

As part of the discussions, we also suggested that as part of any 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.