

**Proposal for a Children in Care and Care Leavers Alliance**

**1. Report:**

This brief report sets out the proposal to establish a Children in Care and Care leavers Alliance. In Walsall, we are committed to being dedicated and compassionate corporate parents. Our children and young people in and leaving care are some of the most vulnerable in society. It is crucial that as Corporate Parents we work collaboratively with a range of partners to ensure our children are supported to be safe, happy and thriving. The proposal for a Children in Care and Care Leavers Alliance is a mechanism to improve support to our children and address the issues that were brought to the fore in the production of 'It Takes Village' where our children highlighted some of the challenges they faced as they exited the Care System.

The purpose of this item is:

1. For Corporate Parenting Board to approve the formation of a Children in Care and Care Experienced Alliance.
2. To review the attached Terms of Reference.
3. Corporate Parenting Board to oversee the action plans developed within the Alliance.

**2. Introduction and Background:**

The outcomes of children and young people in care have been extensively researched, there is a clear pattern of lower educational attainment of care experienced children and young people when compared to their non-care experienced peers. There is over representation of care experienced young people in the prison population and care experienced young people account for 26% of our prison population. Whilst targeted policy is in place to support the educational attainment of young people in care, they continue to be less likely to transition to higher education at the ages of 18 and 19 years of age. They are more likely to experience isolation and poor mental health when compared to non-care experienced peers.

Walsall Care leavers collaborated with Open Lens in 2023 resulting in the powerful production of 'It Takes a Village'. The young people involved in the production demonstrated courage in sharing their own personal accounts of their experiences of the care system and the issues they faced when leaving care. Whilst many challenges were identified, there was also insight into what worked well within the care system. Our young people have told us that they need additional support around budgeting, gaining employment and skills, feeling connected to their families, and having a greater sense of belonging within their community. Following the production of 'It Takes a Village' there

was a call to action whereby the Council and its partners committed pledges to supporting children and young people specific to the issues raised by them.

The intention is to build on the learning of the Walsall Children's Alliance and form an alliance committed to achieving the pledges committed by wider partners. Our key partners which include the wider community all have their part to play. By working together, we can support our children and those leaving care to take advantage of the range of opportunities that Walsall can offer to help them reach their full potential. As their Corporate Parent it is incumbent on us to hold high aspirations for our children and to support their sense of belonging that has been compromised owing to the difficulties and trauma they have experienced in their young lives.

Every good parent should ensure that:

- Their children are safe and in a secure environment.
- Their children are protected and are supported to develop interconnectivity with significant adults in their life and within their community.
- Their children are ambitious, and that support is in place to enable them to reach their full potential.
- Their children's achievements are celebrated and shared.

### **Corporate Parenting Pledges**

The Alliance seeks to act on the existing pledges to Looked After Children and Care Experienced Young people but will act as a steering group to support the local authority in fulfilling its statutory duties as Corporate Parents to achieve the highest standards of support and to ensure that we are aspirational for those that are in or have been in our care.

### **Education**

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

### **Health**

- We will support you to maintain and improve your health and wellbeing.
- A Good and Safe Place to live.
- We will do all that we can to make sure that you have a home where you feel safe, happy and healthy and where you feel well cared for and supported. We will make sure that your carers have access to the support they need to make this happen for you.

### **Pledges to Care Leavers**

- We will improve access to education, employment and training and help you with your career plans.
- 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.

- We will provide improved access to health support and go to medical appointments with you if you are worried to go alone.
- We will help you learn about budgeting and what bills to pay to help achievement of financial stability.
- 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.

### **3. Resource and legal considerations:**

The expectation is that each partner organisation will dedicate a senior strategic lead who will consistently attend the Alliance and ensure that Corporate Parenting duties and responsibilities are adhered to. Relevant legislation consideration includes:

The Equality Act 2010 with specific reference to the recent motion that Walsall Council treats individuals with Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic.

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Leaving Care Act 2000
- Children and Social Work Act 2017

#### **Council Corporate Plan Priorities:**

The Alliance will provide a significant opportunity to secure commitment from both the Council and partners to develop services and opportunities for our children in care and care experienced young people:

- Walsall people will have appropriate skills and access to jobs, so economic benefits are felt in each of our communities.
- Make a positive difference to the lives of Walsall people: Increasing independence and improving healthy lifestyles so all can positively contribute to their communities.
- Children are safe from harm, happy and learning well with self-belief, aspiration, and support to be their best: Walsall children are provided with the best start in life so they can fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to their communities.
- Safe, resilient, and prospering communities: Walsall is a clean, safe, and healthy place, with the right housing to meet need, accessible to all and with a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.

We are Walsall 2040 also outlines the following ambitions for residents:

- Thriving and happy
- Healthy and well
- Prosperous and innovative
- Proud of our Borough

In addition, our Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines that every elected member and employee of this Council, along with our partner agencies, is a corporate parent to the children in our care. And as such, we are all responsible for providing the best possible care, safeguarding and outcomes for the children who are looked after by us.

**Performance management:**

The Corporate Parenting Board reviews quarterly the performance information relating to children in care and care leavers.

**Reducing inequalities:**

The alliance will seek to reduce inequalities experienced by our children by seeking the commitment of partners in delivering on each organisations pledge to end disparity and inequality faced by children in care and care experienced young people. The organisational pledges are aligned to the thematic issues and challenges identified by our young people and highlighted within the documentary 'It Takes a Village'.

**Consultation:**


Co-production was undertaken through the collaboration of the documentary 'It Takes a Village' whereby our young people relayed their own personal experiences of being in the care system and raised issues that can only be addressed by working closely with key partner agencies.

**4. Recommendations:**

- To develop a Child in Care and Care Leavers alliance made up of colleagues from the Council and key partners.
- That these colleagues are at an appropriate senior level within their organisation to influence policy and strategy within their organisation to assist with the raising of opportunities and aspirations of our care population, based on the expressed views and experiences of our children in care and care experienced young people and to deliver on the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- The actions and recommendations agreed by this group will be shared with the Corporate Parenting Board (inclusive of the specific engagement sessions with our children in Care and Care experienced young people and the children in Care Council.
- That Corporate Parenting Board approves the proposal to form an Alliance.

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## **Children in Care and Care Leavers Alliance**

### **Terms of reference**

#### **Purpose**

The group will act as a Strategic Steering Group that will support the work of the Corporate Parenting Board ensure that collectively we are fulfilling our statutory duties as Corporate Parents to achieve the highest standards of support and ensure that we are aspirational for those that are in, or have been, in our care.

Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe our collective responsibility to care for and support our children and young people in care.

All staff, partner agencies and elected Councillors are therefore defined as “corporate parents” and have a duty to be responsible for the welfare and protection of these children and young people.

A strong ethos of corporate parenting means that sense of vision and responsibility towards the children we look after and that they, and our care leavers are a priority for everyone.

#### **Legal framework**

As part of our duties to children in care and care leavers, the seven Corporate Parenting principles of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 will apply.

These are:

1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of children and young people.
2. To encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes, and feelings.
3. To consider the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people.
4. 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.
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships, and education or work.

7. To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living. To ensure best outcomes for children together with best value arrangements to meet and reduce needs and meet Statutory Duties we may also need to consider:

- Care Planning, Placement and Care Review Regulations 2010
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children and Families Act 2014

### **Objectives of the group**

- To ensure Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers have an equal chance of having a great life.
- To champion the needs and raise aspirations of our children and young people who are the responsibility of the Walsall Council
- To ensure that the council and partners are fulfilling their responsibilities in relation to our children and young people with regards to Corporate Parenting as set out in the Children & Social Work Act 2017.
- To actively support and challenge themselves and each other to deliver the best outcomes for those we hold corporate parenting responsibility for.
- To commit to improving the welfare of children and young people in our care and to enhance the support of those that have left the care system.
- To act as champions and raise the profile of the Corporate Parenting responsibility of Walsall Council and its partners within their own services and organisations.
- To actively engage our Children and Young People in Care to support us and have their say in regards to how they should be best supported.

### **Membership**

The Membership of the Board will consist of:

- **Chair:** Executive Director, Childrens Services Walsall Council
- **Vice Chair:** Director for Childrens Social Care, Walsall Council
- Head of Service, Corporate Parenting – Zoe Morgan
- Principle Social Worker – Hannah Thompson
- Representative from Customer Engagement – Elise?
- Representative from Access and Inclusion – Sharon?
- Representative from Commissioning – Paula or Isabel?

- Head of Early Help and YJS – Rachael Beards
- Representative from WHG – Connie Jenkins
- Head of Virtual School - Lorraine Thompson
- Lead from Leisure and Commercial Services – Stuart?
- Head of Service, Regulatory and Provider Services – Jivan Sembi
- Strategic Lead from Walsall Works - ?
- Childrens Champion – David Hughes
- Strategic Lead from Adults Social care – Eve Morris
- Apprenticeships Programme Lead – Helena Baxter
- Designated Nurse Children and Young people in Care – Catherine Masterson
- Lead commissioner – Health – Mags Court
- Strategic lead – Probation – Natalie Lau
- Lead from West Midlands Police - Prevez

### **Frequency**

The Board will meet three times per year to consider matters which affect Children and Young People of Walsall.

### **Expectations of members**

- Group members will remain focussed on the best outcomes for children and young people in the care of Walsall Council.
- Group members will agree to carry out any actions allocated to them before the next meeting.
- Group members will commit to championing the engagement of children and young people with whom we have corporate parenting responsibility for.
- Group members will adhere to the confidentiality agreement of this meeting.
- Group members will make sure, if they are unable to attend and alternative representative will be identified.

### **The responsibility of the Group is to:**

Ensure Walsall Council continues to deliver in line with our Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Members will represent their organisations and be at an appropriate senior level to be able to influence policy strategy and operational delivery and to assist with meeting the needs and aspiration of Children and Young People of Walsall.

Members will be committed to attending the Alliance Meetings and following up on actions assigned to them. If unable to attend then they should send an appropriate representative in their absence.

### **Governance**

The group will be report into Walsall Corporate Parenting Board. Reports and information pertaining to the actions of this group will be provided to the Corporate Parenting Board as and well required.

### **Review**

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed on an annual basis at the beginning of each municipal year.

June 2024