

**Corporate Parenting Board
13 November 2023**

Title of the Report: Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025

Executive Summary:

Walsall Council has a duty to seek out every opportunity to support children and young people in our care. The 3-year strategy and the action plan were approved by the Board in January 2022. This report provides an update on the progress against the action plan for 2022/23 and the proposed action plan for 2023/24. The Corporate Parenting Strategy and revised Action Plan is presented to the Corporate Parenting Board for approval and assurance that we will deliver our ambition to support children in our care and care experienced leavers.

This report informs the Board of the performance of the Council as a corporate parent, and the outcomes that have been achieved for the children in its care from April 2022 to March 2023.

The Council works in partnership with others to ensure that families who need support in the community to care for their children within their family and family network. For some children this is not possible, and they become children in our care. Every councillor and officer within a council has a statutory responsibility to make good decisions for children in our care and care experienced young people (also known as care leavers) as a parent would for their own child, in this context councillors are Corporate Parents.

The corporate parenting strategy sets out our ambition for our children in care and care experienced young people, and how this will be achieved. The Corporate Parenting Action Plan will make the ambition in the strategy a reality.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To agree the Board's shared partnership ambition for children in our care and care experienced young people

To support Walsall Council in meeting its legal responsibilities in regard children in our care and care experienced young people.

Recommendations:

The Board members are asked to

1. The Board committee note the progress against the action plan for 2022/23
2. Agree the priority areas and action plan for the delivery of the strategy.

Background papers:

None

Resource and legal considerations:

There are no resource implications associated with the development of the strategy.

The Council has various duties under the Children Act 1989 to children in its care and to children and young people who leave its care. It also has a duty under s 1 Children and Social Work Act 2017, in carrying out functions in relation to the children and young people in its care and formerly in its care who meet statutory criteria to have regard to the seven corporate parenting principles.

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.

Citizen impact:

The services and the improvements play a key role in the quality of life and outcomes for the children, young people and families of Walsall.

The Council and its partners as Corporate Parents make critical contributions to improve outcomes.

Environmental impact:

There are no environmental implications associated with the development of the strategy.

Performance management:

The delivery of the strategy will be monitored through the Corporate Parenting Board.

Reducing inequalities:


Successful delivery of a strategy to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers will have a significantly positive impact on the outcomes of one of the most vulnerable groups.

Consultation:

The children in care council is one of the key forums through which services for children in our care and care experienced young people seek to consult on service delivery and where children and young people are able to shape and influence the parenting they receive at every level.

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Report: Corporate Parenting Strategy and Our Action Plan	
1.0	Background
1.1	This strategy highlights the collective responsibility we all have in fulfilling our duty as corporate parents. The strategy outlines the mission, vision and values that we will uphold and sets out our key priorities and actions we will take to achieve them, identifying measures that will tell us whether we have been successful.
1.2	Corporate parenting refers to the shared responsibility across the Council to ensure that children and young people in our care or leaving care are supported to thrive. Children in our care and care experienced young people are vulnerable individuals who often have difficult and traumatic experiences in some of the most formative years of their lives.
1.3	This Corporate Parenting Strategy is informed by the views of Children in Care Council and was agreed by the Board in 2022. It is aligned with Corporate Plan and the changed legislative and national policy context. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 guides the actions of corporate parents towards children in care and care leavers. These are covered in detail in Walsall's Corporate Parenting Strategy,
1.4	<p>The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out how the Council will deliver its role as a corporate parent and ensure that children and young people have the support, care and encouragement to reach their full potential. This report informs the Board of the performance of the Council as a corporate parent, and the outcomes that have been achieved for the children in its care from April 2022 to March 2023.</p> <p>Revised Strategy can be found in Appendix 1 The Action Plan for 2022/23 can be found in Appendix 2 The Action Plan for 2023/24 can be found in appendix 3</p>
2.0	Policy, Legislative & Regulatory Context
2.1	<p>The Children and Social Work Act 2017, defines in law, the role of corporate parents and set out seven corporate parenting principles that require all services within a local authority, including staff, elected members and partner agencies, to recognise their role as a corporate parent and encourage them to look at the support and services they provide.</p> <p>Our Corporate Parenting Strategy seeks to embed these principles within the council and beyond with our Partners and broader community The principles underpin everything we will do and explain how the collective ambitions for children and young people will be made real.</p>
2.2	The seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people</i> • <i>to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings</i> • <i>to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people</i> • <i>to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners</i> • <i>to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people</i> • <i>for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and</i> • <i>to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.”</i>
2.3	<p>The key policy change for children in care and care experienced young people since 2022 is set out in the Government’s publication of Stable Homes, Built on Love Implementation Strategy which addresses the recommendations to reform Children’s Social Care, as set out in the Independent review of children’s social care: Final report; Child Protection in England; and the Children’s Social Care market study.</p>
2.4	<p>The Stable Homes, Built on Love Implementation Strategy is built around six key pillars.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families 2. A decisive multi agency child protection system 3. Unlocking the potential of family networks 4. Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care 5. A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one 6. A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data
2.3	<p>Pillar 4 which focuses on improving how we care for our children and care experienced young people has six key “missions” to improve the care system</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <p>1. Ensure strong, loving relationships for care-experienced children.</p> <p>The government will provide funding to increase the number of local authorities with family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes. They will also explore ways for care-experienced people to legally formalise a lifelong bond with someone they care about.</p> <p>2. Increase the number of local, high-quality, stable and loving homes.</p> <p>The government will work with local authorities to deliver a fostering recruitment and retention programme. It will set up an expert group to review standards of care, regulations and guidance and explore ways to increase financial oversight of large providers of homes. It will also pilot a regional approach to care provision through Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs)</p> <p>3. Strengthen and extend corporate parenting responsibilities across the public sector.</p> <p>The government has consulted on corporate parenting principles to identify areas in need of improvement and the possibility of extending the range of bodies the principles apply to.</p> <p>4. Improve education, employment and training outcomes.</p>

	<p>The government will look at expanding the Virtual School Head role to children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25. It will increase the funding of post 16 education for children in care and establish an accreditation scheme for providers of further education to aspire to when working with care leavers. Plans also include expanding the number of jobs and apprenticeships available to care leavers.</p> <p>5. Increase suitable accommodation for care leavers and reduce homelessness.</p> <p>Plans include increasing the leaving care allowance and removing the local connection requirement for care leavers seeking access to social housing.</p> <p>6. Reduce disparities in mental and physical health outcomes and improve wellbeing.</p> <p>Existing guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of children in care will be updated and extended to cover care experienced young people up to the age of 25. The government will also look at supporting the training needs of social care practitioners around mental health.</p>
<p>2.4</p>	<p>Stable Homes, Built on Love sets out key milestones for delivery. Phase 1 (up to the end of March 2025) will focus on addressing urgent issues, setting the national direction and laying the foundations for reform. Phase 2 will focus on embedding reform, subject to funding, parliamentary time and the outcomes of related consultations.</p> <p>These changes will inform the revision of our Corporate Parenting Strategy in 2024/25</p>
<p>2.5</p>	<p>The Corporate Parenting Strategy has 5 key strategic priorities: Our priorities respond directly to Our Promises, a list of commitments to children and care leavers, developed and agreed by the young people themselves and endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Safety and Permanency: All of our children and young people will be safe from harm, with stability provided through secure homes and excellent carers.</i> 2. <i>Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing: We will educate our young people to encourage a happy and healthy lifestyle, making sure that professionals work together to ensure that all their health needs are met.</i> 3. <i>Education and Employment: We will champion our young people and help them succeed in education and training, supporting lifelong learning and the pursuit of their interests.</i> 4. <i>Transitions and Independence: Our young people will be prepared for the world of work and supported to become active citizens when they leave care. They will be prepared for independence in the best way possible.</i> 5. <i>Influence and Involvement: Children and young people are at the heart of service design, delivery and evaluation</i>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Summary</p> <p>At the core of the strategy is our intention to drive the corporate parenting principles and delivery for our children, young people, and young adults into all areas of the Council and our partners, and to unashamedly leverage all opportunities to improve the life chances of</p>

children in care and those who have left care. It reflects the high aspirations that we have and what can be achieved by everyone working together to promote the best interests of children in care and those that have left care.

It is an aspirational strategy, which will be delivered through the development of an annual delivery plan and by championing this work across the whole Council and with the wider community of partners across Walsall who can make a difference to the lives of our children and young people.

Walsall has a significant record of investment in services for our children in care and our care experienced young people, we have a partnership that is committed to achieving improved outcomes for our children. The strategy sets a high ambition for how we can continue to build on that investment and see meaningful transformation in the life chances of the most vulnerable in society.