

Cabinet – 13 July 2005

Progress report on the corporate parenting strategy

Portfolio: Councillor Eddie Hughes, Children's Services

Service Area: Children's Services

Wards: All Wards

Forward Plan: Yes

Summary of report:

The Walsall Corporate Parenting Strategy is a two year programme which was launched in May 2004. It sets out a series of actions from those sections of the Council and partner agencies which have a responsibility for establishing a high quality corporate parenting role. The strategy supports the corporate parenting role which will ensure the Council puts its children first, keeps them safe, listens to them, meets their physical, social, cultural, psychological, health, educational and emotional needs, and supports them through to independence, i.e. the council is a good parent to its children. This report sets out to highlight what has been achieved, at the mid point of the lifespan of the strategy.

Recommendation

That a report reviewing the role of elected members undertaking children's residential visits will be taken to Children's Scrutiny Panel.

Resource and legal considerations

The Children's Services budget for 2005/06 contains the financial resources to support the corporate parenting proposals. This includes DfES grant funding initiatives, particularly in terms of raising the educational attainment of looked after children. Most of the proposals within the action plan are contained within the Council's medium term financial strategy. The strategy fulfils the duties and expectations of local authorities as laid down in current legislation and statutory guidance.

Citizen impact

The corporate parenting strategy will maximise the life chances of children and young people so that they are equipped to become independent, mature adults.

Community safety

The corporate parenting strategy seeks to create strategies to reduce offending behaviour by looked after young people.

Environmental impact

None directly arising from this report.

Performance and risk management issues

The initiatives within the corporate parenting strategy are embedded in service plans within all relevant council service areas. They are further included in individual staff performance monitoring. For instance social workers are expected to review personal education plans to timescales and thereby help to raise educational attainment. Therefore via service planning and individual performance monitoring, we intend to progress towards vision 2008.

The commitment of elected members and senior officers in all service areas will ensure that progress is made towards the agreed actions.

Finally, the Children's Services plan specifically monitors the overall strategy and the risk register reflects the assessed risks.

Equality implications

The corporate parenting strategy will provide enhanced opportunities to children and young people at risk of social exclusion, enabling them to participate more productively in their local communities.

Consultation

The strategy was originally launched in consultation with elected members, staff groups and children and young people. Consultation continues with relevant partners upon initiatives contained within the action plan as they are developed.

Vision 2008

The strategy supports the Walsall vision. In particular it contributes to the priorities in relation to making Walsall a healthy and caring place (5), encouraging everyone to feel proud of Walsall (6), strengthening the local economy (8), listening to what people want (9), thereby helping Walsall to transform itself into an excellent authority by 2008 (10). Members have made specific pledges to give Walsall's children, including looked after children, better opportunities to achieve potential and to involve service users in planning and improving the way we deliver services.

Background papers

If this were my child – Frank Dobson’s letter to all councillors 1998.
Corporate Parenting Strategy Action Plan - attached

Contact officer:

Pauline Pilkington – Assistant Director (Children’s Services)

Signed
Executive Director



David Martin
Date: 21 June 2005

Signed
Portfolio Holder



Cllr Eddie Hughes
Date: 4 July 2005

1. Legal and Policy Background

- 1.1 In 1998, the Government launched the 'Quality Protects' programme, a five year plan which aimed to improve the life chance benefits of children and young people. A particular emphasis was placed on the responsibility for children looked after by local authorities.
- 1.2 The former Secretary of State for Education, Frank Dobson, wrote to all local elected members outlining their responsibilities to enhance the opportunities available to looked after children. In the letter he asked them to consider whether the support and opportunities provided by local authorities would stand the test of asking themselves 'would this be good enough for my child'?
- 1.3 Following on from the Quality Protects programme, legislation and a range of statutory guidance have been introduced, The Children Act 2004 states that 'looked after' children have a right to expect the same outcomes we all want for every child – that they should be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution to society, and achieve economic well being. To achieve these five outcomes for looked after children, local authorities as their 'corporate parents' should demonstrate the strongest commitment to helping every child they look after, wherever the child is placed, to achieve the highest educational standards he or she possibly can. This includes supporting their aspirations to achieve in further and higher education.
- 1.4 Under Section 52 of the Children Act 2004, local authorities in carrying out their duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children looked after by them, must give particular attention to the educational implications of any decision about the welfare of these children. It also promotes the concept of a local member being a 'champion' of services to meet the needs of children. Councillor Eddie Hughes has this role in Walsall, and has actively discharged this duty, attending many functions and events.

2. Progress of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan

- 2.1 The corporate parenting strategy and action plan was approved by Cabinet on 2 June 2004. The action plan is based on a two year programme 2004 – 2006. This report sets out to highlight some of the achievements at the mid point of the lifespan of the action plan.
The direct link to the action plan is :-
<http://intranet/socialcare/children/corparentstrategy.htm>

3. Education and Training

- 3.1 The strategy for raising the educational attainment of looked after children was praised in an OFSTED report in October 2004, which noted that 'the provision for looked after children has significantly improved and is now good as a result of the effective leadership by senior officers and collaboration across departments'.

- 3.2 Partnership arrangements between Social Care and Education Walsall continues to strengthen, and is evidenced by a joint data base which provides information to track and monitor the education progress of looked after children. The children's champion Councillor Eddie Hughes is also the Education portfolio holder.
- 3.3 Active programmes are in place to raise educational attainment and improve attendance and reduce exclusions. Currently 98% of looked after children have personal education plans and since April 1st 2005 75% have been reviewed. Training and guidance documents have been produced for designated teachers and social workers. The capacity to promote educational attainment is included in foster care reviews. Nearly every looked after child has access to a personal computer. A specific IT programme with children subject to statements of special educational need at Castle View Home has produced a significant increase in attainment.
- 3.4 At the end of the academic year 2003/4, looked after children missing education for 25 days or more was the lowest since this data collection commenced in 2000. 12 looked after children received awards for 100% attendance. 130 looked after children were nominated for achievement awards at the second Excellent Night Out held in November 2004. Targets for 2005/6 include being able to evidence the added value of the many initiatives such as holiday homework clubs aimed at increasing the attainment of looked after children. One of the difficulties of attaining national performance targets is that many looked after children have statements of special educational need, and therefore in some years it is not possible to improve on examination results such as GCSEs. However we are committed to demonstrate that every child irrespective of their level of ability has achieved 'added value' in their education.

4. Training/Employment/Accommodation

- 4.1 The Transition and Leaving Care Team have worked to achieve a total of 12 out of 16 care leavers (75%) engaged in education, training or employment at the age of 19 years. This is the performance assessment framework figure for 2004/5. (This is the 2005 cohort of care leavers counted for the PAF indicator; at the current time the Transition Leaving Care team is working with a total of about 150 care leavers.) This represents excellent progress and is comparable with or superior to our neighbouring authorities.
- 4.2 As part of the action plan, 5 work experience placements were created for care leavers. One young person is actively applying for jobs in the leisure section following a very successful placement. An employment co-ordinator is to be appointed in June 2005 in order to maintain a work experience/training programme for care leavers who attended the council's recruitment fair in 2004. A further event will be held on the 23 July 2005.
- 4.3 The Transition and Leaving Care Team, working with Caldmore Area Housing Association and other housing associations, have managed to establish accommodation for 13 out of 16 care leavers (81%). This is more than in most comparable authorities.

5. Health

- 5.1 The sexual health and relations policy for looked after children was launched in December 2004 and staff were trained in March. The policy aims to reduce the number of unplanned teenage pregnancies. Under the sex, lies and love programme, plans are being made to establish preventative strategies for young people vulnerable to sexual exploitation.
- 5.2 There has been an increased emphasis on health promotion working with looked after young people. Sessions to encourage healthy eating, fitness and a healthy lifestyle are promoted at residential homes, the leaving care 'drop in' and other venues. A 'health fax' folder has been developed with looked after children which helps them, often for the first time, to collate their medical life history. The numbers of LAC who have all the required health checks continues to be high the PAF indicator at 86% for 2004/05.

6. Leisure and Culture

- 6.1 Many looked after children participated in the Ready Steady Summer programme activity session run in August 2004. Instances of reported crime were reduced by 18.5%. A further programme is planned for the forthcoming summer holiday.
- 6.2 The community arts team continues to work with looked after children and young people on a number of projects. Councillor Hughes attended a play called Friends, which explored relationships. A regular group of looked after young people, 'Team A', is developing skills to design and support art programmes for other young people. For instance they mentored a variety of performance art carried out by 7 to 10 year olds at Easter. Currently young people are learning skills to produce their own quarterly magazine, which will include interviews with elected members and senior officers.

7. Listening to Children

- 7.1 It is our policy to listen to the views of children and young people whenever new initiatives are being developed or when a review of a particular service takes place. Young people translated the 'overarching strategic aims for children's services' into user friendly language, renaming it the rainbow plan. Other examples include participation in the sexual health and relationships policy and the health fax.

8. Future Progress

- 8.1 Elected members are referred to the action plan attached to this report. Elected members and senior officers in all service areas have a responsibility to progress the outstanding actions in the corporate parenting strategy during 2005/06.
- 8.2 In order to demonstrate the support and commitment of elected members to the corporate parenting strategy, and in order to move towards vision 2008, the 'oversight' function of elected members under regulation 33 (visits to residential homes) requires review. Accordingly it is proposed that a panel report will be taken to Children's Scrutiny Panel in order to progress this matter.