

**CHILDREN SERVICES CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY
2021-2024**

**CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
(COUNCILLOR GRAHAM HINCHEY)**

**CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND
SKILLS (COUNCILLOR SARAH MERRY)**

AGENDA ITEM: 3

Reason for this Report

1. This report seeks approval for the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy. It has been developed in consultation with our current Looked After Children, Care Leavers across the city and partners. This three year Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines Cardiff Council's commitments, challenges and the key steps we need to take to ensure that our children have the best possible outcomes in life.

Background

2. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024 replaces the previous Corporate Parenting Strategy 2016-2019 and incorporates throughout the document a greater focus on the voice of Children Looked After and Care Leavers.
3. When a child or young person enters the care of the Council, the role of being a parent is taken on by the local authority. This is known as Corporate Parenting. The term describes how Cardiff Council collectively fulfils parenting responsibilities, by seeking positive outcomes for Looked After Children and young adults who are care leavers in the same way any good parent would do for their own children. From early years into adulthood we seek to ensure that all our children, young people and young adults are safe, happy and have every opportunity to thrive.
4. Section 78 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 imposes a duty upon a local authority to safeguard and promote the well-being of each child it looks after. Under sections 104 – 118, a local authority has similar duties to promote the well-being of Care Leavers.
5. The role of a corporate parent is to seek for children in public care the outcomes every good parent would want for their own children. Local

authorities in Wales have a legal and moral duty to provide such support to the children it looks after. Elected Members have a responsibility to ensure that children looked after by a local authority are able to thrive, are nurtured, supported, educated and prepared for adult life in the way any parent would want for their own children.

6. The range of legislation, regulations and social policy that has been taken into account when developing this strategy, includes, but is not limited to:
 - The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014
 - The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015
 - The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
 - The Regional partnership Emotional and Mental Health strategy
 - The National Review of Care for Children in Wales 2019, CIW
 - Delivering Excellence in Children's Services and the Youth Justice Development Strategy: All our futures 2020-22.

Issues

7. Children who suffer Adverse Childhood Experiences and then come in to the care of the local authority as a result are more likely to suffer a range of health problems and have a greater need for support. A national study in Wales found that children who had 4 or more ACES were:
 - 3.7 times more likely to currently be receiving treatment for mental illness
 - 9.5 times more likely to have ever felt suicidal or self-harmed
 - 16 times more likely to have used crack cocaine or heroin
 - 20 times more likely to have been incarcerated in their life
8. We are seeing an overall trend of increasing demand for Children's Services, notable since shortly after the first lockdown in March 2020. This increase in demand is expected to continue, particularly as children are now starting to return to school.
9. The number of Children Looked After has steadily increased, from 644 in March 2016 to 972 in December 2019. In early 2020 the work to implement the Children's Services strategy was beginning to turn the curve and the trend for the number of children looked after was reducing. By the end of April 2020 the number of Children Looked After was 937. However, after this decrease early into the first national lockdown, a subsequent increase in new admissions led to children looked after numbers increasing to 990 at the end of October 2020. The number of children looked after has been relatively stable since this time, but is being closely monitored against the increasing demand across Children's Services.
10. One of the key priorities in delivering the Children's Services Strategy is to shift the balance of care, to ensure that children are in the right place, at the right time, staying as close to home as possible. Delivering on this crucial commitment will entail implementing a Reunification Framework so children can return to live with family where it is safe for them to do so, as

well as working with providers to offer a sufficient supply of the types of placements needed to meet demand. Other work streams aimed at shifting the balance of care include the discharge of Care Orders for children placed with their parents where safe and appropriate to do so, increasing the proportion of children who are subject of Special Guardianship Orders or placed with kinship carers, and preparing young people for independence by increasing provision in the Young Person's Gateway.

Addressing these challenges

11. The Corporate Parenting Strategy is a three year multi agency that sets out what we all need to do as corporate parents to support our Looked After Children and Care Leavers to enable them to thrive and improve outcomes. The Corporate Parenting strategy outlines five key priorities based on the views and experiences of Looked After Children in Cardiff.

The five priorities identified by our young people were:

- **Priority 1:** Improving emotional well-being and physical health
 - **Priority 2:** Better connections, improved relationships
 - **Priority 3:** A comfortable safe stable home whilst in care and after
 - **Priority 4:** Educational achievement, employment and training
 - **Priority 5:** Celebrating our children and young people
12. The strategy makes specific reference to Childrens Rights including UNICEF UKs Child Friendly Cities and Communities initiative. Specific reference is also made to safeguarding and inclusion.
 13. Cardiff's Corporate Plan sets out a number of key ambitions for the city. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024 takes forward key elements of the first Well-being Objective outlined in the Corporate Plan. Ensuring that Cardiff is a great place to grow up.
 14. National and local data is provided showing a range of indicators for Looked After Children data specifically relating to education, housing and care leavers. This data will help with decision making and service development planning for the future.
 15. An action plan is being developed outlining the responsibilities of partners and key outcomes linked to the strategy. The action plan will take forward the priorities outlined in the strategy and inform the work programme for the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee for the forthcoming year.

Participation of young people

16. Engagement took place between March and September 2020 in physical and virtual focus groups to actively involve Looked After Children from the outset in the development of our Corporate Parenting Strategy. These sessions took place through a range of creative means with children, young people and Care Leavers engaged from ages 5 to 27. Participants were from a range of looked after settings and backgrounds, including children with disabilities.

17. Sessions were held through a mixture of interactive group workshops using a variety of methods ensuring identities of the young people involved were protected. Separate engagement sessions were held according to the age of the Looked After Child in order to ensure the sessions were age appropriate and worthwhile with over 20 young people taking part.
18. Looked After Children in Cardiff took part in a number of age appropriate surveys via the Bright Spots Survey in 2018. This survey was a partnership between Bristol University, the Childrens Commissioner for Wales and Cardiff Council. The views of 255 young people were gained using surveys through a number of key themes including relationships, resilience, recovery and wellbeing. The surveys were organised into three categories depending on age; 4- 7 year olds, 8- 11 year olds and 11-18 year olds. This was to help young people to get the most out of the exercise, and where appropriate a trusted adult was able to support.
19. Feedback from these surveys helped influence our Corporate Parenting Strategy and together with findings from a number of engagement sessions with young people ensured that the document placed Looked After Children's views at the centre. The draft priorities in the Corporate Parenting Strategy were all developed from the views and feedback received from these consultations.

COVID 19 restrictions

20. In line with COVID 19 restrictions a series of online sessions also took place with children, young people and stakeholders. The sessions obtained the views of what was working well, what could be better and what the aspirations were for Looked After Children and Care Leavers in the future. This feedback was fed directly into the strategy ensuring that the priorities outlined for the future were based on what Looked After children in Cardiff said.

Consultation with partners

21. Due to a change in operating model as a result of the global pandemic the original timescales and engagement plan was adapted in order for staff and resources to be repurposed to meet the new challenges faced by the Directorate.
22. The Corporate Parenting Strategy was developed based on the views of children and young people, stakeholders and members of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee. The range of activities were undertaken throughout the year in order to obtain this feedback are summarised below.
23. Due to COVID-19 restrictions the participation of children and young people was adapted in order to continue to provide young people opportunities to feedback to the strategy in a safe way. Activities have been grouped into relevant months below.
 - (a) In **January 2020** a consultation workshop was held with Children Looked After and Care Leavers to gain their views on what works

well, what wasn't working well and their aspirations for the future. At the workshop a range of creative methods were used to ensure that the sessions were fun and engaging for those attending and to help young people to express themselves in a range of different ways. Members of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee took part in formal and informal sessions in order to have a say in the development process.

- (b) In **February 2020** a session was held with foster and kinship carers to establish their views which contributed to the development of the Strategy. A second consultation workshop took place with children and young people in order to gather information on what was working well in their lives, what wasn't working well and what they would need to help them achieve their aspirations

In **February 2020** an engagement session event took place with over thirty five key stakeholders from internal and external agencies. The event provided an opportunity to share knowledge, insight and expertise from a range of professionals that helped to shape the Strategy.

- (c) In **September 2020** two further online digital interactive sessions took place with children and young people to build on the information gathered in the workshop in February. The sessions were divided into younger and older age groups in order to ensure participation was age appropriate.

In **September 2020** a virtual stakeholder session was held with representatives from a variety of internal and external agencies. A wide range of representatives attended the workshop to provide their insight and expertise into the challenges faced by Children Looked After and Care Leavers in Cardiff. Officers from Education, NHS, Police, Youth Justice Services, Housing, Communities, Child Friendly City Team, Legal Services, and Children Services, all contributed to the document providing their knowledge and experience. Prior to this, there was extensive communication with individual agencies.

- 24. Following the workshop regular updates were provided to stakeholders to inform them on the development of the strategy and to confirm changes made based on their feedback. For those who were unable to attend the workshop feedback was obtained electronically and changes made based on their views and knowledge.

Scrutiny Consideration

- 25. The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee is due to consider the strategy on 15th March 2021, and feedback from this committee will be circulated at cabinet.

Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee Consultation

26. The Cardiff Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee brings together strategic partners to work with and for the Councillors elected by the citizens of Cardiff to improve outcomes for Children Looked After and Care Leavers.
27. In **January 2020** members of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee were provided with a presentation setting out the vision of the co-produced strategy and an outline of how young people, the committee and stakeholders would be involved going forward. Members and Children's Services' Officers also came together in **January 2020** in an informal session to support the development of the Strategy.
28. In **October 2020**, virtual one to one sessions were offered to all members of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee to provide any individual feedback they may have had on the document. An informal group session then took place in October to bring members and Children's Services' Officers together to discuss finalising the strategy. Any changes made through these processes have been provided to the committee via regular electronic updates.
29. The Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee considered the draft Strategy at its meeting on 9th March 2021 and recommended the draft Strategy should be submitted to Cabinet for approval.

Reason for Recommendations

30. The proposed Corporate Parenting Strategy will act as the key policy platform outlining how the Council will discharge its corporate parenting responsibilities and prioritise delivery of services for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. The aim is to improve outcomes, develop services in response to changing need and strengthen participation of children and young people in Corporate Parenting

Financial Implications

31. There are no new financial implications arising from this report. The aims and objectives set out within the strategy will be funded via a combination of base budget Council funding and external funding, where relevant. Should there be any new expenditure commitments arising, these will need to be met from within existing resources or new external grant funding.

Legal Implications

32. This report recommends the approval of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-24, which has been developed by the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee (CPAC) under its remit 'To develop, monitor and review a corporate parenting strategy, and ensure its effective implementation through work plans and corporate parenting training programmes', (paragraph (h) of CPAC's terms of reference). The approval of all non-

policy framework strategies is reserved to Cabinet under Section 2 of the Scheme of Delegations (paragraph 4).

33. In considering this matter, the Council must have regard to its public sector equality duties under the Equality Act 2010 (including specific Welsh public sector duties). This means the Council must give due regard to the need to (1) eliminate unlawful discrimination, (2) advance equality of opportunity and (3) foster good relations on the basis of protected characteristics. The protected characteristics are: age, gender reassignment, sex, race – including ethnic or national origin, colour or nationality, disability, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, sexual orientation, religion or belief – including lack of belief. An Equalities Impact Assessment aims to identify the equalities implications of the proposed strategy and due regard should be given to the outcomes of the Equalities Impact Assessment (Appendix B to the report).
34. When making any policy or strategy decisions, the Council must also be mindful of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Welsh Language Standards and consider the impact of its proposals upon the Welsh language.
35. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires the Council to consider how its decisions will contribute towards meeting its well-being objectives (set out in the Corporate Plan). Members must also be satisfied that the Council's decisions comply with the sustainable development principle, which requires that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
36. Other relevant legal implications are set out in the body of the report.

HR Implications

37. There are no direct HR implications for this report or strategy. However, if the report is agreed, all employees will be made aware of the strategy and how their service can support the Council's role as Corporate Parents.

Property Implications

38. There are no property implications in respect of this report. The Strategic Estates Department will assist where necessary in delivery of the Children Services Corporate Parenting Strategy and where there are property transactions required to deliver any proposals, they should be done so in accordance with the Council's Asset Management process and in consultation with Strategic Estates and relevant service areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is recommended to approve the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024 (attached as Appendix A)

SENIOR RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Deborah Driffield Director of Children Services
	12 March 2021

The following appendices are attached:

- Appendix A - draft Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-24
- Appendix B - Equalities Impact Assessment (to follow)

The following background papers have been taken into account

Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee report, 'Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-24', 9th March 2021