

## **Children and Families Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	11 July 2022
<b>Report Title:</b>	Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy, 2022-26
<b>Report of:</b>	Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care
<b>Report Reference No:</b>	CF/51/21-22
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All wards

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. This report sets out the proposed new Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-26, previously known as the Corporate Parenting Strategy, for Cheshire East to improve outcomes for our cared for children and care leavers.
- 1.2. The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy meets the strategic aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 as it contributes to 'A council which empowers and cares about people' and the priority to 'be the best Corporate Parents and improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people'.

### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1. Our strategy has been developed with our cared for children and care leavers. They told us that some of the language used in our current Corporate Parenting Strategy is too clinical and not meaningful to them. We therefore worked together to rename our strategy the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy.
- 2.2. During the development of the strategy, we have conducted an online survey to give foster carers an opportunity to share their views and ideas.

- 2.3.** We have held discussions during our workstream groups and the Corporate Parenting Operational Group where managers, frontline staff, councillors, education, voluntary sector, and health colleagues were able to share their views on the priority areas and actions.
- 2.4.** Our current pledges have been refreshed in line with children and young people's wishes and we have added an additional pledge to focus on participation, i.e., listening to and involving our children and young people in decisions and services that affect them:
- We will care for our cared for children and care leavers as any good parent would.
  - We will improve education, employment, and training outcomes.
  - We will be truly aspirational to give all children and young people a forever home and to keep them safe.
  - We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes.
  - We will prepare children and young people for adulthood.
  - We will work TOGETHER with children and young people.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1.** The Children and Families Committee is recommended to endorse the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-26.
- 3.2.** The Children and Families Committee is recommended to endorse the decision to take the pledges in the strategy to full Council on 19 October 2022, where members can pledge their commitments to cared for children and care leavers.
- 3.3.** The Children and Families Committee is recommended to endorse the decision to change the name of our Corporate Parenting Committee, further recommendations regarding the change of name will be brought to a future committee following consultation with children and young people.

### **4. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1.** Cheshire East Council needs to ensure that it has a current and relevant strategy in place to improve outcomes for our cared for children and care leavers. Other options to be considered are therefore not applicable.
- 4.2.** Changing the name of our Corporate Parenting Committee will promote a consistent change in the language used when talking about cared for children and care leavers, to reflect their wishes and align with the launch and delivery of this strategy.

### **5. Background**

- 5.1.** The existing Corporate Parenting Strategy runs from 2018 to 2021 and was endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Committee in November 2018, along with the 'youth proofed' pledges to cared for children and care leavers.

- 5.2. The pledges were subsequently accepted and endorsed by the full Council in December 2018 in order to make the commitment to cared for children and care leavers by members and officers and to ensure that there is a clear and joint vision about Corporate Parenting in Cheshire East as being everyone's responsibility.
- 5.3. The council also decided that all key council decisions be considerate of the potential consequences and benefits to cared for children and care leavers, and that this be achieved by asking a mandatory question in each report about the impact of the decision upon cared for children and care leavers.
- 5.4. Good progress has been made in achieving the pledges set out in the 2018-20 Corporate Parenting Strategy. This progress has been reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee each year via the Corporate Parenting Annual Report.
- 5.5. The intention was to develop a new Corporate Parenting Strategy in 2020, ready to launch in 2021. However, due to the increased demands from the COVID-19 pandemic, this was put on hold and the current strategy was endorsed to run throughout 2021.

## **6. Consultation and Engagement**

- 6.1. During the development of the strategy, in March 2022 we conducted an online survey to give foster carers an opportunity to share their views and ideas. Their responses around the relevance of the pledges echoed that of the children and young people we spoke to, with some feeling the use of 'being a good corporate parent' is vague and lacks context. 72% felt that a pledge around participation should be included in our new strategy. Some foster carers commented that they would like improved communication with them to be included as part of the new strategy and we have developed actions to support this in our action plan. The Fostering Service is also reviewing our foster carer charter alongside foster carers to ensure that we can further strengthen communication with them.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1. Legal**

- 7.1.1. The proposed strategy meets the authority's statutory duties to cared for children and care leavers.

### **7.2. Finance**

- 7.2.1. None.

### **7.3. Policy**

- 7.3.1. As a corporate parent, all council policies should consider the impact on cared for children and care leavers.

#### **7.4. Equality**

- 7.4.1. All children and young people have a right to be treated equally and have their disability, gender, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic needs met. As corporate parents for children and young people in care and care leavers, it is essential that the council is able to demonstrate that it considers equality implications in all decisions made in relation to cared for children and care leavers. Cared for children and care leavers can be a vulnerable group because of their experiences so we need to ensure they are supported to achieve the same outcomes as their peers as they can experience disadvantages and are at risk of poorer outcomes.
- 7.4.2. An equality impact assessment has been carried out and will be published along with the endorsed strategy.

#### **7.5. Human Resources**

- 7.5.1. The recruitment and retention of social workers and frontline colleagues is an essential component of the delivery of the strategy.

#### **7.6. Risk Management**

- 7.6.1. Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group for whom there are a number of risks, including poor outcomes in education and training, health, safeguarding and transition into adulthood. The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy outlines plans to mitigate these risks.

#### **7.7. Rural Communities**

- 7.7.1. All communities are affected by the contents of this report, and it is necessary to strategically plan the delivery of services to serve all communities.

#### **7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

- 7.8.1. The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy sets out clearly our intentions to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people, along with our pledges and priorities for 2022-26.

#### **7.9. Public Health**

- 7.9.1. Cared for children and care leavers are more at risk of poor health outcomes. Health services need to be targeted to ensure that they meet the needs of this group of children and young people. A number of pledges within the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy addresses the health and wellbeing of this group of young people.

#### **7.10. Climate Change**

- 7.10.1. This strategy is aligned with the council's aim to be green to lead our communities to protect and enhance our environment, tackle the climate emergency and drive sustainable development. This includes our pledge to strive to ensure that every child and young person will have the opportunity to live in a good, safe home locally, either with their family or in another long-term home,

**Access to Information**

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Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy, 2022-26 Appendix 2- Cared for Children and Care Leavers Equality Impact Assessment.
Background Papers:	The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018-21 can be found at: <a href="https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/corporate-parenting-strategy.pdf">corporate-parenting-strategy.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</a>