

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

December 2020

Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Strategy 2020-24

Report by Executive Director of Children Young People and Learning

Electoral divisions: All

Summary

The previous Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy 2018-2021 needed refreshing and rewriting due to the service changes required to improve social work practice for children looked after and care leavers since the Ofsted inspection of February 2019. A new strategy has now been written to reflect the current priorities, plans and the changes required to deliver effective services that will achieve sustainable and positive outcomes for children looked after and care leavers.

Recommendation

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People is asked to approve the Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Strategy, at Appendix 1, for adoption and implementation.

Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 One of the recommendations in the [Ofsted report](#) following the inspection of Children's Services in West Sussex, published in May 2019 was to improve the rigour and impact of corporate parenting arrangements. To support this outcome, a new Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Strategy is needed to refresh the previous strategy (2018-2021) and to clearly identify key areas for improvement and include the Council's aspirations as corporate parents to improve outcomes for children looked after and care leavers.
- 1.2 The Strategy provides the strategic direction of the Council in terms of meeting its obligations as corporate parents and as a means to plan, monitor and evaluate progress. It sets out the aims, priorities and areas of development required to achieve the necessary changes for children looked after and care leavers to achieve sustainable and positive outcomes.

2 Proposal details

- 2.1 The Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Strategy identifies seven key priorities that will govern the strategic direction and delivery of the services provided to children looked after and care leavers, as identified below:
- **Supporting** children and their families when there is **a risk of children becoming looked after**, and where possible **enabling them to live with their families**
 - Ensuring we have a **sufficiency of high-quality placements**, in the right places to meet children's and care leavers' needs
 - The child's **need for permanence** will best be met by being brought up within a secure, stable and loving family environment, that can support them through childhood and beyond
 - Children looked after and care leavers are **happy and healthy**
 - Children looked after and care leavers are supported to **achieve in education and to access leisure opportunities**
 - Children looked after and care leavers can **participate in decisions** that affect their lives, and have their views sought and responded to
 - Children looked after are **supported to leave care and transition into adulthood**
- 2.2 Senior officers have taken account of good quality social work practice and compliance with statutory requirements, to inform the Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Strategy. The Cabinet Member is asked to endorse a comprehensive and aspirational approach that when implemented will deliver strong help, support and appropriate services for children looked after and care leavers to improve their outcomes in life.

Action Plan

- 2.3 A Corporate Parenting Action Plan has been drawn up to give practical effect to the strategic principles detailed in paragraph 2.1.
- 2.4 The Action Plan is a living document which includes specific targets which are regularly monitored and reviewed at each meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Five subgroups, chaired by key partners have been created to lead the work required to ensure that the priorities in the Strategy are being progressed. For example, there is an Education subgroup, chaired by the Head of the Virtual School; a Health subgroup, chaired by the senior manager for the Joint Commissioning Unit; a Journey to Independence subgroup chaired by the senior manager for Care Leavers; a Voice and Participation subgroup, and a Performance and Data subgroup. Alongside these, there is a wider group which is reporting on Permanence issues across the service.

3 Other options considered

- 3.1 There is a need for West Sussex County Council to have a Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Strategy and as such there are no other options considered as the existing strategy is due to expire in 2021. The option of 'doing nothing' is not tenable in this case, due to the risks set out in Section 6.

4 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 4.1 The Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Strategy has been developed jointly and collaborated on by staff, children and practitioners.
- 4.2 It has been consulted on as a draft document through the Voice and Participation service, where the Children in Care Council (CiCC) was engaged with and invited to participate in its development, and they were also involved in the discussion at the Corporate Parenting Panel on 25 June 2020. The CiCC is made up of young people aged 10-16 who are in care and being looked after by West Sussex County Council; it gives young people the chance to have their voice heard about the services that affect them. The draft Strategy has been agreed by the Children's Services Departmental Leadership Team, all key partners within the consultation process and its development aligned with the appropriate governance arrangements.
- 4.3 The draft Strategy was considered by the Corporate Parenting Panel at its meeting on 25 June 2020; Panel Members supported adoption of the Strategy.
- 4.4 Between 19 August and 16 September 2020 a public [consultation](#) was published on the County Council website using the 'Have your say' facility. This was made available to professionals, children and young people and carers. A total of 67 responses from adults were received to the online consultation. These comprised care professionals (38), foster carers or family and friends of care experienced persons (18) and residents and others (11). A total of 4 responses were received from children and young people, comprising looked after children (4). Therefore a total of 71 responses from all sources was received.
- 4.5 A summary of the responses and comments provided is set out in Appendix 2. Feedback from the findings was supportive and positive, and welcomed the strategic approach. A response to update those young people who provided feedback on how their comments have shaped the Strategy has been published on the County Council [website](#).
- 4.6 The effect of the consultation was a full endorsement of the content of the draft Strategy document, and no textual changes were proposed. However, as a result of the feedback from the consultation some actions have been taken, including employing a specific partnership officer to progress the improvements needed. A thorough improvement and action plan has been created and new work has commenced with the Care Leaders Fellowship to improve the local offer and further embed the voice of children and young people in the service's work with them.
- 4.7 The full set of consultation responses has been made available to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People for consideration.

5 Finance

- 5.1 The financial costs of implementing this Strategy are routinely managed through the relevant budgets for social work services. Any specific additional costs identified in the future to implement this Strategy are subject to scrutiny via the Improvement Fund and managed by the Executive Director for Children, Young People and Learning.

6 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
<p>There is a significant risk that if this Strategy is not implemented in full, social work services will not deliver the quality of help and support required for children looked after and care leavers, to ensure sustainable and positive outcomes for them. This could lead to significant risks and reputational damage to the Council such as further inadequate judgements from Ofsted and a lack of progress to make the necessary changes to social work practice for children and young people and their families.</p>	<p>There is no mitigating action as it is critical that this Strategy is adopted and implemented.</p>

7 Policy alignment and compliance

West Sussex Plan: Policy Impact and Context

- 7.1 Following the Ofsted inspection report published in May 2019, West Sussex County Council has embarked on a significant improvement journey within Children’s Services that is overseen by a Commissioner appointed by the Department for Education. There is a clear Practice Improvement Plan in place, already endorsed by the County Council, to improve the quality and delivery of social work services for all children in West Sussex. The Children Looked After and Care Leavers’ Strategy is a key document required within this Plan; it identifies the responsibilities of the Council as corporate parents and lays out the aims, priorities and areas of development required to achieve the necessary changes, for children looked after and care leavers to achieve sustainable and positive outcomes.

Legal Implications

- 7.2 There are no specific legal implications for the implementation of the Children Looked After and Care Leavers’ Strategy. It will ensure the delivery of social work services to children and young people is compliant with all the relevant statutory frameworks. The legislation that underpins the responsibilities for council members to undertake their duties as corporate parents is outlined in the Social Work Act 2017.

Equality Duty and Human Rights Assessment

- 7.3 Under the Equality Act, the Council has a public sector equality duty to ensure that all aspects of this legislation are fully covered. The Children Looked After and Care Leavers’ Strategy includes the need to ensure that all children looked after and care leavers are protected from unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and takes account of the need to:
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Please see the Equality Impact Assessment report attached as Appendix 3.

Lucy Butler

Executive Director of Children Young People and Learning

Contact Officer

Louise Warren, Senior Improvement Lead
Contact number: 033022 24653

Appendices

1. Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Strategy
2. Consultation Summary
3. Equality Impact Assessment report

Background papers - None

Consultation Summary

'Have your say' Survey, 19 August-16 September 2020

We asked

In West Sussex, we want to make sure that children who are looked after and care leavers get the best possible support and help when they need it. We have been working on putting together a new strategy which sets out how we are going to do this. We wanted to know what you thought of our strategy. Your views are important to us as we want to make this the best strategy we can create – one that has the greatest impact on making young people in care and care leavers lives the best they can be.

You said

- The number of responses we received was 71 in total.
- 82% of people that responded were either a professional working with young people in care and care leavers or a foster carer or family friend of children in care and care leavers. We know that you have a lot of experience and knowledge in what *doing the best* means for our children.
- 94% of people who responded to the consultation said they strongly agreed or agreed with the principles outlined in the proposed strategy.
- 98% of people who responded to the consultation said they strongly agreed or agreed with the seven priorities set out in the draft plan.
- 63% of people who responded to the consultation said they strongly agreed or agreed with the with the statement "The strategic priorities outlined can be met where relevant by my team, service or partner agency".
- 63% of people who responded to the consultation gave a rating of 5 or 4, (where 1 represents 'not at all confident' and 5 represents 'extremely confident'), in relation to how confident they were that they were able to help implement and achieve the West Sussex's commitments to improvement where relevant to their professional role.

We specifically noted that you had mentioned the following areas in your responses:

- You wanted the service to be more explicit in how we will ensure children and young people are placed closer to their homes and communities.
- Children and young people keep the same social worker.
- More emphasis on education.
- Young people learn independent skills earlier.

We Did

We've listened to your views and considered these in creating the final version of the Strategy. This has now been passed to the Corporate Parenting Panel who will oversee and scrutinise the priorities set out in the Strategy. We have taken the following actions in response:

- Incorporated your feedback into the Action Plan where appropriate.
- Moved the structure of the Care Leavers' service from Early Help to Children's Social Care.
- Brought in a manager who will focus on and monitor the Corporate Parenting Action Plan and the improvements to our work being led with our partners, particularly Health, Education and Housing.
- Set up five Corporate Parenting Panel subgroups which are progressing the actions required to ensure we meet the priorities set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- Started work with the Care Leaders Foundation to improve our local offer for care leavers and to further embed the voice and views of young people.