



Committee and Date

Item

Council

12 December 2024

Public



Shropshire Corporate Parenting

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1. Synopsis

- 1.1 Corporate Parenting is the term used to recognise the collective responsibility of local authority's actively promoting the life chances of children in care and care leavers as if they were "my child" and provide them with the best possible care and protection.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on our how our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and activities are being delivered.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The term 'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for our children looked after and care leavers up to the age of 25.
- 2.2 When a child comes into care, the council becomes the Corporate Parent. Children looked after may include:
 - those in residential care,
 - those in foster care,
 - those in kinship care, who live with a family member other than a parent, and
 - those who are looked after at home
 - those who have left care.

- 2.3 Shropshire Council is the corporate parent for 724 children looked after and 287 care leavers as at the time of writing (11/11/24).
- 2.4 Effective corporate parenting needs a commitment from all council employees and elected members to demonstrate that 'looked after' children and care leavers should be cared about, not just cared for.
- 2.5 [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers, statutory guidance for local authorities](#) (February 2018) sets out:

The role that councils play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. Local authorities have a unique responsibility to the children they look after and their care leavers (relevant and former relevant children). In this context local authorities are often referred to as being the 'corporate parent' of these children and young people, and the critical question that local authorities should ask in adopting such an approach is: 'would this be good enough for my child?'

2.6 **What can I do in my everyday role?**

- Be **an advocate** for our children and young people.
- **Raise profile** and support within Shropshire Council and wider.
- **Hold others to account** and think 'is this good enough for my child?'
- **Always think** of a child in care or care leaver in policy and practice
- Ensure **services** meet the needs of our children and young people (e.g. health, housing, leisure)
- Use your **influence** and **network** in the council and with businesses and organisations that could support.
- Be part of the **Corporate Parenting Steering Board**
- Ensure we maximise our **social value** through our council contracts.
- Be **Visible**
- **Support** at events

2.7 Shropshire Council's **Corporate Parenting Strategy (Appendix 1)** has been refreshed this year along with the Care Leavers Local Offer (**Appendix 2**) which has also been updated. This strategy outlines key considerations and plans for Shropshire Council and its partners in our role as corporate parents of children in care and those leaving care.

2.8 Shropshire Council is committed to bringing love back in the system approach in how we shape and deliver services for the children and families we serve.

2.9 There is a well-established Corporate Parenting Steering Board that acts as an advisory and consultative body to the Council, its partners and its committees and other strategic groups and will provide robust challenge to ensure that Corporate Parenting duties are carried out effectively and consistently. It will ensure that the outcomes and life chances of children in care and care leavers are improved so they are in line with their peers and will act as the champion for these children and young people.

- 2.10** The statutory framework for the strategy applicable to Local Authorities and Partner agencies is established in section [1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017](#). It is also an integral part of the Ofsted Inspection framework, and the Corporate Parenting Principles are referenced in Ofsted's Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services framework.
- 2.11** Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 all Councils must have regard to enact 7 Corporate Parenting Principles when exercising their functions in relation to children and young people looked after and care leavers. These principles are as follows:
- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people;
 - To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
 - To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
 - 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;
 - To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
 - For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
 - To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
- 2.12** The Corporate Parenting Strategy explains how we, as the Council, will be an effective and trustworthy corporate parent for every child or young person who is in our care, respecting their unique individuality and valuing their diverse needs and views relating to their age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or disability.
- 2.13** Hearing and responding to the lived experience and voices of our children and looked after young people will be the 'Golden Thread' driving our Strategy.
- 2.14** The strategy encompasses this approach, namely that the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of our public policies, programmes and decisions.
- 2.15** The role that people, places and organisations play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. Children looked after and care leavers have the same fundamental needs as us all – to be loved, cared for and feel safe, this includes how we promote and support recovery, resilience and well-being, respectful of past trauma but not allowing it to define and limit the child's future.
- 2.16** In Shropshire we have high aspirations for what our children and young people can achieve and how we can support this together. A child who is cared for by the Council has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a good parent.

2.17 This means as a Council we will:

- ✓ Know our children, their needs, talents and aspirations and promote their interests.
- ✓ Hold high aspirations for their future and expect the best for and from them.
- ✓ Take an interest in their successes and problems and show our pride in their achievements and celebrate them.
- ✓ Listen to their views and ensure they influence practice, service developments and policy.
- ✓ Ensure they are consulted about their own lives and plans.
- ✓ Recognise, support, and respect their identity in all aspects.
- ✓ Ensure our children attend their education regularly.
- ✓ Promote and support high academic achievement by working with our schools and carers to ensure that the needs of our children are understood and met.
- ✓ Support their health and emotional well-being and resilience.
- ✓ Support transition to adult life and promote their economic prospects & prepare them to become responsible citizens.
- ✓ **and most importantly....** as a Council we will preface all our thinking, planning, actions and decisions with:

“Would this be good enough for my child.....?”

2.18 The aim of this Corporate Parenting Strategy is to make sure that when children and young people are looked after by Shropshire Council they feel we are working together as a family and as a ‘Village Around Our Children’ with our partners so they can be safe and secure and cared for, have stability in their lives and that we help them to achieve their full potential by supporting them in fulfilling their ambitions and aspirations as they either move on to their adult lives or move out of our care back to their own family or an alternative permanent family.

2.19 Objectives of this Strategy

- A. **Elected members** have a clear understanding and awareness of the needs of our children in care and care leavers and ensure their responsibilities as corporate parents are reflected in all aspects of the Council’s work.
- B. **All services delivered by the Council play a part** in delivering Corporate Parenting and continually monitoring and reviewing what their services contribute to improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers.
- C. **The Corporate Parenting activity** leads to measurable improvement in the life chances of children in care and care leavers, so these are in line with their peers.
- D. **Communication** between elected members, council officers, those who care for them, and children looked after, and care leavers ensures they have a say in how decisions are made about services affecting them and can influence those decisions.
- E. **Partnership working and joint planning** and commissioning is promoted as an effective means of delivering effective services.
- F. **We deliver on our Corporate Pledges** (such as the Shropshire Council Children In Care And Care Leavers Charter) (**Appendix 3**)

- 2.20** Effective support for our children and care leavers is critical so they do not experience poorer life chances because of the circumstances of their birth or their family, where they came from, what they believe, or whether they have a disability.
- 2.21** Shropshire's strategic planning and delivery for children looked after and care leavers has engaged young people from a diverse range of communities and identity. Services continue to strive to improve the cultural competence in how we deliver to our children, young people and communities. Consequently, whilst progress is evident it will remain a priority area for continued focus.
- 2.22** In October 2018 the Government launched the Care Leavers' Covenant. Unlike the 'Local Offer', signing up to the Covenant is not a statutory requirement. Rather, it is a voluntary indication of a desire to do their utmost to fulfil their role as a corporate parent to care leavers.
- 2.23** In February 2019 and again in February 2022, the Council signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant (Appendix 4) The request is that Council Members reconfirm their sign up to this covenant, demonstrating councils ongoing commitment to delivering it to our young people who leave our care.
- 2.24** In March 2024, Full Council carried the motion that care experienced people would be a protected characteristic. Resolving:
- That it recognises that care experienced people are a group who are likely to face discrimination.
 - That it recognises that Councils have a duty to put the needs of disadvantaged people at the heart of decision-making through co-production and collaboration.
 - That future decision, services and policies made and adopted by the Council should be assessed through Equality Impact Assessments to determine the impact of changes on people with care experience, alongside those who formally share a protected characteristic.
 - That in the delivery of the Public Sector Equality Duty the Council includes care experience in the publication and review of Equality Objectives and the annual publication of information relating to people who share a protected characteristic in services and employment.
 - That this Council will treat care experience as if it were a Protected Characteristic.
 - To formally call upon all other bodies to treat care experience as a protected characteristic until such time as it may be introduced by legislation.
 - For the council to continue proactively seeking out and listening to the voices of care experienced people when developing new policies based on their views.
- 2.25** We have established an independent charitable Trust 'Above and Beyond' for young people looked after and care leavers to enable them to fulfil their aspirations as they move into adulthood. We will be looking at different ways to fund raise including applying for grants from organizations like the National Lottery and Tesco's blue coin scheme and exploring payroll contributions from employees. (**See appendix 5**)

- 2.26** The Local Authority are required to consult on, and produce, a Local Offer for its Care Leavers, under Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The Local Offer provides information about services and support available to Care Leavers from the local authority, including information about both statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support that a local authority chooses to provide.
- 2.27** We have published Shropshire Council's Local Offer since 2018 and updates have been made in the years that followed.
- 2.28** The Care Leavers Local Offer has been reviewed and revised over 2024, and the revised version is now ready to be uploaded onto the website subject to Corporate Parenting Steering Group consultation. It is critical document \ information for:
- our young people who are care experienced,
 - our workforce who directly support our care leavers
 - wider Council members and
 - Regulatory bodies e.g. Ofsted
- 2.29** To ensure that high quality services are offered, the revised offer has been compared with neighbouring local authorities. This confirms that the proposed offer to Shropshire Care Leavers is appropriate, in line with comparable neighbours and that it meets the needs of our Care Leavers, supporting them towards independence.
- 2.30** All elected members must ensure that public services used or required by children and young people looked after are of a high quality, integrated and take account of need. They must ensure they are fully informed of the issues facing children looked after by understanding their characteristics and by knowing how well services are performing in meeting their assessed needs.
- 2.31** As previously mentioned, In 2018 The Department for Education published [Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities](#) for applying Corporate Parenting Principles for children in their care and care leavers. As corporate parents, elected members and council officers have a statutory responsibility for the wellbeing of children in care. Elected members play a large part in holding officers and partners to account as well as being proactive in the corporate parenting role themselves, this includes ensuring that the needs of children and young people in our care are met. This can be by ensuring that council policies prioritise the needs of these children and young people, promoting fostering and adoption, sharing information about employment opportunities, advocating for care leavers that live in their local area. Through membership on Committee's ensuring that the needs of children in our care are considered and well met. These are just a few examples, the responsibility is broad and opportunities wide ranging.
- 2.32** Elected members will be supported in meeting their responsibilities by relevant council officers. They will provide leadership that will encourage and support partnership and joined-up working. This will ensure that funding, commissioning, and priority setting deliver the best combination of services for children and young people in care and care leavers.
- 2.33** The Lead Member for Children's Services and members on the Corporate Parenting Steering Board have a particular responsibility to ensure all members are aware of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the role of members to promote this.

- 2.34** Training is provided for all members following any election, so this statutory duty as part of their role is understood.
- 2.35** Members are requested to re- sign / sign today their commitment to promote the Care Leavers' Covenant with partners and businesses they come into contact with, and to refresh their commitment to the Shropshire Council Children In Care And Care Leavers Charter (Appendix 3) There will be copies available before and during the meeting so that Members can Sign their commitment.

3 Recommendations

That Council

- 3.1** All Council members sign up to or re-sign (if previously done) the Care Leavers Covenant.
- 3.2** Endorse the Corporate Parenting Strategy approved by the Corporate Parenting Steering Group, so as to meet the aims, objectives and outcomes of the Council as a good corporate parent.
- 3.3** Approves the Corporate Parenting Steering Board continuing to act as an advisory and consultative body to the Council, its partners and its committees and other strategic groups so as to ensure that the Council's Corporate Parenting duties are carried out effectively and consistently.
- 3.4** Supports the launch of the Care Leavers charity, **Above and Beyond (the details of which are set out at (Appendix 5)**

Report

4 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1** The recommendations in this paper pose no risks for the Council. Other than there is a reputational risk in not offering such opportunities or delivering services in line with our corporate parenting responsibilities.
- 4.2** The Council may be judged as not being as good a corporate parent as we could be by our children in care and care leavers and by external scrutiny such as DfE or Ofsted. Ofsted's Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework specifically considers corporate parenting when reaching its judgements: *The local authority is an active, strong and committed corporate parent – in line with the corporate parenting principles... Leaders champion corporate parenting and act as corporate parents themselves.*

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1** Shropshire Council is currently managing an unprecedented financial position as budgeted for with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy approved by Council on 29 February 2024. This demonstrates that significant management action is required over the remainder of the financial year to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all Cabinet Reports provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. Where non-essential spend is identified within the Council, this will be reduced. This may involve
- scaling down initiatives,
 - changing the scope,
 - delaying implementation, or
 - extending delivery timescales.
- 5.2** There is a significant budget pressure on spot purchase residential placements and Independent Fostering Agency Placements. This budget is constantly monitored and care plans for children reviewed. There is targeted support for children to be supported to move to foster care or back home when it is safe and in the child's best interests to do so.

6 Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1** All workers in teams are mindful of how they travel to statutory visits and meetings that have to be in person. Workers are asked to be mindful of diary planning and minimising travel.
- 6.2** As part of the Corporate Parenting role we support schools and extra-curricular activities for children to promote awareness of climate change and ensure children and young people are educated and aware so that they can make informed choices.

7 Background

- 7.1** The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced by The Children Act 2004, which placed collective responsibility on local authorities and their partners to achieve good outcomes for all children in and those leaving public care.
- 7.2** The term 'Corporate Parent' defines the collective responsibility of elected members, employees and partner agencies to provide the best possible care for children looked after and care leavers.
- 7.3** The notion of being a corporate parent was strengthened further by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which highlighted the following seven principles, which are embedded in Shropshire's Corporate Parenting Strategy, of being a corporate parent. These are:
- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of those children and young people;
 - to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
 - to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;

- 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; •
 - to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
 - for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
 - to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
- 7.4** The Corporate Parenting strategy aligns with the Shropshire Plan, it sets out Shropshire Council’s vision and commitment and explains how we will be an effective and trustworthy corporate parent to our children in care and care leavers.
- 7.5** The Council has demonstrated its commitment to care experienced children, young people and care leavers through its Children In Care And Care Leavers Charter and its resolution in February 2022 to support Care Leavers Covenant (**Appendix 4**)
- 7.6** Our priorities over the next 3 years are set out in the strategy and are matched against the Corporate Parenting Principles, taking account of the voices and experience of our own children and young people looked after and care leavers, our Children’s Charter and the Council’s Pledge(**See Appendix 3**)
- 7.7** The Council is asked to endorse the refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy and updated action plan.
- 7.8** *Summary of Corporate Parenting Strategy Priority Actions for 2024-2025*
- ✓ We will implement a new **Participation Strategy**.
 - ✓ In February 2024 Shropshire Council will be asked to approve a Motion (*accepted in March 2024) to accept that **having care experience is treated as if it were a Protected Characteristic**. **Completed**
 - ✓ We are starting up **an independent charitable Trust ‘Above and Beyond’ (see appendix 5)** for young people looked after and care leavers to enable them to fulfil their aspirations as they move into adulthood. **Completed to launch by January 2025**
 - ✓ Further **develop the Council’s apprenticeship and work experience offer** across all Council services and with our partner agencies to offer more employment and training opportunities for our children looked after and care leavers.
 - ✓ Host an event to **promote the Care Leavers’ Covenant** again with businesses and partners.
 - ✓ **Each department in the Local Authority will be looking at what it can pledge specifically to our care experienced young people**. The Council can then officially pledge its offers of support available to care leavers through “MyCovenant” which will then be published on the MyCovenant App.
 - ✓ Implement the **new Mental Health Pathway with BeeU**. **Completed**
 - ✓ Provide additional Business Support to social workers to complete the information for **Initial Health Assessments in timescale and to a high standard to inform their Health Plans**. **Completed**

- ✓ The updated **Care Leavers' Local Offer** will be published by the end of December 2024. (See **Appendix 2**)
- ✓ We will implement any actions agreed as an outcome of the **Regional Care Leavers' Offer Project**.
- ✓ We are commissioning **an additional children's home** for young children who are not ready to live within a family setting yet. This will enable the children to remain living locally. **Completed**
- ✓ We are updating our **Sufficiency Strategy** (2024). **Completed**
- ✓ We will have a new **End-to-End Permanence Strategy** in 2024 to reflect our priority to enable most children to remain living within their family, either with a parent or a connected carer, without needing to be looked after. Where children need an alternative family, we will make decisions and take actions swiftly. Where children's needs are best met by being looked after, we will ensure they are cared for in a stable home where long-term needs are met. **Completed**
- ✓ The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will monitor **Shropshire's 'Stability Index'** through these measures for our children looked after:
- ✓ The **Virtual School Improvement Plan** aims to improve attainment and to increase inclusion and reduce exclusions. This will be overseen by the Virtual School Governing Body and progress reported to the Corporate Parenting Steering Board. **Completed**

8 Additional Information

8.1 Key Structures to support the momentum, impact and outcomes include:

- ✓ **Children in Care Council**. Local authorities are required to establish a Children in Care Council to represent the views of looked after children to those responsible for the service.
- ✓ **Corporate Parenting Steering Group**. Although not a statutory requirement, most local authorities have established a group of elected members to oversee the corporate parenting function of the local authority.
- ✓ **Safeguarding Community Partnership**. The Safeguarding Community Partnership is a wide range of partners who come together to prevent and tackle Child and Adult abuse and Community Safety (with scrutiny from the Independent Chair). Each partner organisation retains its own existing lines of accountability and responsibility. The Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership acts to seek assurance, scrutinise, challenge, and ensure agencies are enabled to work together to achieve the aims of the Partnership.
- ✓ **Integrated Commissioning Board**. The ICB and the local authority should agree joint action on the health needs of looked after children in their area and develop a joint commissioning strategy.
- ✓ **Health and Well-Being Board**. A forum for key leaders from the health and social care system to work together to improve the health and well-being of the local population and reduce health inequalities. As a group at risk of poor health, it will be important to ensure that the needs of looked after children and care-leavers form part of their remit.
- ✓ **The Virtual School**. The Virtual School is responsible for providing strategic direction, targeted support and securing successful educational outcomes for all children and young people in care.
- ✓ **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)**. Dedicated provision is required for looked after children. In some authorities this has led to the creation of

specialist teams; in others it has been interpreted more narrowly. In Shropshire this is called BeeU.

9 Conclusions

- 9.1 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 reminds us that *“The role that councils play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. Local authorities have a unique responsibility to the children they look after and their care leavers”*
- 9.2 In February 2018 the DfE published Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities in relation to applying Corporate Parenting Principles for children in their care and care leavers.
- 9.3 As corporate parents elected members and council officers have a statutory responsibility for the wellbeing of children in care. Elected members play a large part in holding officers and partners to account as well as being proactive in the corporate parenting role themselves.
- 9.4 This Corporate Parenting strategy describes how the local authority and its partners, such as housing, health services, and education, act as 'responsible parents' to children and young people living within their care. It sets out our priorities over the next 3 years against the Corporate Parenting Principles, taking account of the voices and experience of our own children and young people looked after and care leavers, our Children's Charter and the Council's Pledge.
- 9.5 Effective corporate parenting requires everyone involved to recognise their role as corporate parents and understand what they can contribute to enable us to be the best corporate parents we can be to all children and young people in our care.
- 9.6 The implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy will support the Shropshire's ambition that every looked after child or care leaver in its care will meet their full potential and have lives in which they thrive. It will ensure that as a corporate parent the Council and its partners will keep children safe, and support, encourage and nurture them so that they reach the heights we all aspire to for our own children.
- 9.7 Members are requested to sign today their commitment to promote the Care Leavers' Covenant with partners and businesses they come into contact with, and to refresh their commitment to the Shropshire Council Children In Care And Care Leavers Charter (**Appendix 3**)

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

[Children and Social Work Act 2017](#)

[Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers](#)

[Agenda item - Motion to accept a proposal that individuals with care experience are treated as if it were a Protected Characteristic — Shropshire Council](#)

Local Member: All

Consultation with Local Member – Please consider the Local Member Protocol (see page E60 onwards of part 5 of the Constitution) and determine whether it is necessary to consult with the local member over the proposal set out in this report. This may not always be applicable (eg where the proposal affects all of Shropshire) but it should always be a consideration and in some cases a necessity so as to comply with the spirit of the Protocol.

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]

Appendix 1 – Corporate Parenting Strategy

Appendix 2 – Care Leavers Local Offer

Appendix 3 – Children in Care / Care Leavers Charter

Appendix 4 – Care Leavers Covenant

Appendix 5 – Above & Beyond Charity