

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023-2026 and other Corporate Parenting Panel Developments

Executive Summary

This report seeks to update Full Council on a number of developments/initiatives on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) and to seek the appropriate approvals:

1. The revised Corporate Parenting Strategy for November 2023 to October 2026 is attached at Appendix 1 for approval. The five Strategic Priorities set out the Panel's focus and ambition to enhance the support for our children looked after and care experienced young people.
2. The National Care Leavers Covenant (CLC) are working with Wiltshire Council to add value to our local offer for our care experienced young people with a view to the Council signing up to the national CLC, for which approval is sought by Council.
3. Officers from the Voice and Participation Service have prepared a poem (attached as Appendix 2) as a response/pledge to our children and young people in care which the CPP have endorsed and recommend to Council that all Councillors as corporate parents pledge their commitment to the poem.
4. That the Council are asked to approve the motion to explore treating Care Experienced as a protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010. If approved the CPP will lead on exploring this further and a full paper will be submitted to Council to approve this at a future date.

Proposals

1. That Council approves the revised Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023 – 2026 attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
2. That approval is given for Wiltshire Council to sign up to the National Care Leavers Covenant.
3. That all Councillors as Corporate Parents pledge their commitment to the poem (attached as Appendix 2) to our children and young people in care as recommended by the Corporate Parenting Panel.
4. That the Council commit to the CPP exploring care experienced as a protected characteristic and progress this to put in place policies and programmes which promote better outcomes for care experienced young people and adults, with a full proposal returning to Full Council for approval.

Reason for Proposals

All Councillors have responsibilities as a 'corporate parent' for children and young people who we care for. This includes responsibility for ensuring that the voices of children and young people continue to be heard and understood by Members, Officers and all Corporate Parents, whilst ensuring these opinions are fully reflected in practice improvement.

Council are asked to approve the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the Care Leavers Covenant, along with approving further exploration to consider making Care Experienced a protected characteristic to ensure that the commitment and ambition for our children in care and care experienced young people is fully supported.

Lucy Townsend

Corporate Director – People/Director of Childrens Services

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023-2026 and other Corporate Parenting Panel Developments

Purpose of Report

1. This report seeks endorsement and adoption of the new Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2023-2026 which also highlights the five strategic priorities that the Panel will focus on during this period.
2. The report also seeks to update Council on the following corporate parenting developments:
 - a. The National Care Leavers Covenant (CLC) are working with Wiltshire Council to add value to our local offer for our care experienced young people and adults with a view to the Council signing up to the national CLC, for which approval is sought by Council. The Care Leavers Covenant is a promise made by the private, public or voluntary organisations to provide support for care experienced young people aged 16-25 to support them to live independently and add value to the local offer. The five core outcomes support the five priorities identified within the Corporate Parenting strategy and are as follows:
 - i) Independent living – Care leavers are better prepared to live independently
 - ii) Education, Employment and Training – Care leavers have improved access to opportunities
 - iii) Safety and Security – Care leavers feel safe, secure and stable in their living situation
 - iv) Health - Care leavers have improved access to health and emotional support
 - v) Finance – Care leavers are financially capable and independent

The National Care Leavers Covenant will work with the Corporate Parenting Panel to support the development of this.

- b. Officers from the Voice and Participation Service have prepared a poem (attached as Appendix 2) as a response/pledge to our children and young people looked after which the CPP have endorsed and recommend to Council that all Councillors as corporate parents pledge their commitment to the poem.
- c. That Officers wish for the Council to consider committing to exploring further developing care experience as a protected characteristic and put in place policies and programmes which promote better outcomes for care experienced young people and adults.

It will mean the Council giving experience of care parity of status with the nine protected characteristics that have protected characteristic status under the

Equality Act 2010: in effect treating it as a tenth protected characteristic within Wiltshire. Four local authorities in the South West have already passed motions to treat care experience as a protected characteristic, including Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (14 December 2022), Plymouth (27 March 2023) Somerset and Gloucestershire (both on 24 May 2023).

The rationale for a fully inclusive approach is that, as a responsible corporate parent, the Council should recognise the significant challenges that people with care experience may have faced, regardless of their current age or the amount of time they have spent in the care system. The decision to treat care experience as a tenth protected characteristic would further cement the Council's existing strong track record as a corporate parent.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

3. The proposals are relevant to the following priorities and objectives in the Council's Business Plan:
 - i) Empowered People – “We get the best start in life”, “we stay active” and “we are safe”.
 - ii) Resilient Society – “We live well together”, and “we ensure decisions are evidence based”.
 - iii) Thriving Economy – “We have the right skills to prosper”.

Background

4. The previous Corporate Parenting Strategy was approved by Full Council on 20 October 2020. The proposed strategy presented today has developed this further to progress our ambition for the next three years. The revised strategy is written in a young person friendly style and ensures that the Council's Corporate Parenting functions support improvements to our services for our young people. The revised strategy clearly sets out the following five strategic priorities, how they will be progressed and what measures there will be to ascertain if/how they are being achieved:
 - i) To feel safe and happy in a stable home and in my local community,
 - ii) To be the best that I can be, to achieve personally and educationally throughout my life and be supported to engage with training and employment opportunities,
 - iii) Ensuring my physical and emotional wellbeing is supported and at a time and place that suits me,
 - iv) To have positive relationships with people who are important to me and for me to be part of my local community where I am trusted, respected, accepted and feel included,
 - v) For my voice to be heard and for it to matter and influence decision making.

Main Considerations for the Council

5. Members of the Children in Care Council were consulted on the revised strategy. On 8 July 2023, Netty Lee (Head of Children in Care and Young People on this date) met with the Children in Care Council to discuss aspects of the revised corporate parenting

strategy, including the promise, the strategic priorities and how they would like to be kept updated as to the progress of the strategic priorities. The young people reported that they had found the previous Dragons Den session really engaging and that they would like to continue with this style of session so that they are able to “challenge” corporate parents and officers on the work that was planned/in progress and completed. In response to this it is planned that the Corporate Parenting Panel will hold two Dragons Den style sessions per year with representatives from the Children in Care Council to provide them the opportunity to review progress of the above strategic priorities.

6. The Children’s Select Committee Standing Task Group scrutinised the revised strategy on 20 September 2023, presented by Head of Service - Netty Lee and Cllr Peter Hutton. Their findings and observations are detailed below:

In summary, the task group,

- *Found the document accessible and well-presented.*
- *Welcomed the involvement of the ‘Child in Care Council’ in the development and review of the strategy and noted that the strategy was more child-friendly than previous years.*
- *Were happy with how the ‘Our Promise’ section had been worded.*

7. The Children’s Select Standing Task Group presented their findings verbally at the Children’s Select Committee on 21 September 2023 and the following recommendations were endorsed by the Committee;

- *That any acronyms are explained in the document, possibly using a glossary.*
- *That a reference is made in the strategy to the process for monitoring performance on the strategic priorities and/or include a link in the document to the corporate parenting scorecard.*
- *That the membership of the Corporate Parent Panel includes a place for an independent person with care experience.*

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

8. In accordance with the agreed overview and scrutiny arrangements - details of the engagement that has taken place with the Council’s Children’s Select Committee/Standing Task Group is highlighted in paragraphs 6 and 7 above.

Safeguarding Implications

9. The revised corporate parenting strategy builds on and strengthens our commitment to children in care and care experienced young people and embedded throughout is the need to ensure that they are safe, secure and well cared for and will be delivered in accordance with Wiltshire Children’s Services Policy and Procedures. The local authority has clear and effective safeguarding procedures in place for children and vulnerable adults. There are no safeguarding implications arising from this report.

Public Health Implications

10. Children Looked After are at particular risk of experiencing inequalities in health outcomes due to their difficult start in life. Within their role as Corporate Parents, Councillors monitor the health and wellbeing support received by our looked after

children to ensure they receive regular holistic assessments of their needs supported by appropriate and accessible service provision. This may include access to a wide range of services including immunisations, emotional wellbeing support or substance misuse services. Public Health are represented at Corporate Parenting Panel.

Procurement Implications

11. There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

12. Due regard is had to the Public Sector equalities duties but as this report is for noting there are no specific equalities issues raised by this report. Further detailed consideration will be given should Councillors endorse the proposal to explore making care experienced a protected characteristic.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

13. There are no implications arising from this report.

Workforce Implications

14. There are no implications arising from this report.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

15. The outcomes identified in the proposed Corporate Parenting strategy will not be fully realised.

Financial Implications

16. There are no implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

17. If the motion to explore making care experienced a protected characteristic is approved, the legal implication will be fully explored within that report when submitted to Council

Conclusions

18. Councillors are asked today to endorse the Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2023-26 which ensures that our ambition is proved to our children looked after and care experienced young people.

Lucy Townsend - Corporate Director – People/Director of Childrens Services

Report Author: Katrina McJannet (Head of Children in Care and Young People)
katrina.mcjannet@wiltshire.gov.uk

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023-2026

Appendix 2 - Poem as a response from the Corporate Parents to our children and young people in care.

Background Papers

None