



Report to: Health and Wellbeing Committee, 15th November 2021

Report of: Corporate Director - Operations, Homes and Communities

Subject: CORPORATE PARENTING UPDATE

1. Recommendation

That the Committee:

- 1.1 Notes the contents of this report and in particular the work being undertaken across the Councils services supporting the Corporate Parenting agenda; and**
- 1.2 Directs officers to engage Freedom Leisure with a view to exploring further options for Kinship Carers and Care Leavers to benefit from reduced fee memberships to access the Councils 3 Leisure Facilities.**

2. Background

- 2.1 Corporate parent responsibilities are intended to encourage people and organisations to do as much as they can towards improving the lives of care experienced and looked after children, so that they: feel in control of their lives, and are able to overcome the barriers they face.
- 2.2 Worcestershire County Council has the main responsibility for "Looked after Children" (LAC). When a child or young person comes into care for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, the authority becomes their corporate parent in accordance with The Children and Social Work Act 2017. The Act describes the following seven principles which should be used when working with the child or young person and being a good corporate parent:
 - Act in their best interests and promote their physical and mental health and well-being.
 - Encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings.
 - Take into account their views and wishes and feelings.
 - Help them to gain access to and make the best use of services provided by the LA and its relevant partners.
 - Promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for them.
 - Ensure they are safe, and have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
 - Prepare them for adulthood and independent living
- 2.3 Corporate parenting is a task that must be shared by the whole local authority and partner agencies including Worcester City Council and under the Children Act 2004 there is a duty to co-operate. Every councillor and officer within a council has a responsibility to act for those children and young people as a parent would for their

own child. Committee members will recognise the importance of Councillor Matt Lambs recent appointment and role as the Council's Children and Young Persons Champion in relation to corporate parenting.

- 2.4 This briefing will discuss the purpose of the Worcestershire Corporate Parenting Board and how Worcester City Council helps looked after children and young people access our services.

3. Worcestershire Corporate Parenting Board

- 3.1 The Corporate Parenting Board in Worcestershire provides leadership and a governance structure for corporate parenting to drive forward the outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. The Chairman of the Board is held by the County Council's Cabinet Member for Children. It oversees the Board's strategy and promotes our pledges to children in care and care leavers. It promotes the voice of children and young people and is influential in decision making. It also provides challenge and scrutiny to ensure the best outcomes are achieved for children in care and care leavers.
- 3.2 The Board is not a public meeting and meets every two months. Attendance is by invitation or at the Chairman's discretion. There is no provision in its terms of reference for public attendance or participation at Corporate Parenting Board meetings. Senior Officers attend the Board from Worcestershire Children's First, Health and Housing and other agencies that have a significant impact on children and care leavers. Young People are also a vital component of the Board. District Councillors are also part of the membership and Councillor Mike Johnson attends on behalf of the City Council.
- 3.3 The Corporate Parenting Board created the following Pledge to looked after children and care leavers:

Pledge 1: Support and help you to keep safe and prevent bullying

Pledge 2: Ensure that your physical and emotional health and well-being is fully supported

Pledge 3: Make sure that your learning is a priority and opportunities maximised to achieve the best outcomes for you

Pledge 4: Support you to leave care when it is safe to do so

Pledge 5: Support your carers by helping them to help you grow and develop into adulthood

Pledge 6: Help you meet regularly with those who are responsible in supporting and caring for you

Pledge 7: Work hard to minimise the number of changes you have in your social worker or Personal Advisor

Pledge 8: Help you to access a range of fun and leisure activities

Pledge 9: Ensure you are fully involved in key decisions being made about your care

Pledge 10: Your carers will make day to day decisions so there is no delay in you being able to carry out safe activities of your choice

Pledge 11: Our aspirations and goals as Corporate Parents will be the same as any good parent. We will require the best for our looked after children not just 'good enough

There is commitment from the Board to review and renew this.

4. Access to Worcester City Council Services

4.1 **The Worcester City Employment & Skills** Strategy is aligned with the Worcestershire Children's & Young People Plan – specifically the outcome to support young people reach their potential. This includes improving outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people, preparing them for adult life. As such we recognise that looked after children, and care leavers are most at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment and training) and we work in partnership with Worcestershire Children's First Team, our housing & community teams in the City Council and with third sector agencies to improve employment & education outcomes for this group. This includes:

- **Apprenticeship Bursaries** - Working with Worcestershire Apprenticeships to ensure that the Care Leavers Bursary is promoted to agencies working with a looked after child and/or care leaver as they decide on their post 16 and post 18 choices particularly as they navigate the financial implications of going into an apprenticeship whilst moving into independent living as they transition from statutory care. We also offer a **Worcester City Apprenticeship Bursary** which can be awarded to looked after child and/or care leaver on top of the government bursary mentioned above. This bursary recognises that young people living independently without the financial support of a family often struggle with the initial low pay in the first year of an apprenticeship – one of the drivers for higher NEET levels in the care leaver cohort.
- **Inclusive Growth** - Between 2018 – 2020 the City Council's Inclusive Growth programme funded projects that supported the NEET group many of whom were Care Leavers. Whilst we did not ask participants to declare if they were Care Leavers we know that many of the 57 NEETs assisted had recently left statutory care. In one instance a young lady leaving care was supported into a work experience placement in the Hospitality Industry and is now a Commis Chef in a prestigious 5 star hotel in the County moving off benefits and moving out of supported housing and into her own private rented accommodation.
- **Agency Liaison** – although we no longer fund specific projects supporting the NEET & Care Leavers group we continue to support employment support providers with liaison in confidence with DWP, housing & the Worcestershire Care Leavers Team to ensure that a young care leaver is getting all of the support they are entitled to through the Corporate Parenting approach.
- **Employer Engagement** – we work with the Careers & Enterprise Company to encourage local employers to offer work experience to young people, particularly those with low social capital which includes looked after children and Care Leavers. The City Council prioritises this group alongside other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups for work experience within the Council, under our Corporate Parenting commitment.

4.2 **Museums Service**

- Looked after children can receive free entry to Worcestershire County Museum and a free individual Commandery pass with free annual visits benefits. These, and Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum's free entry to all, are promoted to foster families via Worcestershire Children First's newsletters.
- The museums' work experience programmes (both in-person and virtual offers) are promoted to care leavers via the County Council's skills networks
- We have hosted celebration workshops at The Commandery for looked after children
- The current project based around Worcester's glove industry and its history recently undertook some digital workshops with looked after children and their families called 'Your Hand in History' which used creative processes to support family learning.

- For the upcoming autumn half-term there is a session arranged about pumpkins and witches at the County Museum for WCF's looked after children's group.
- We don't do anything specifically for kinship carers, but grandparents/grandchildren are a common demographic in museum visiting so we are going to take that one back to the team to think about for the future.

4.3 **Leisure Service**

- From a leisure perspective any individual in receipt of a Carer's allowance or Foster Carers with looked after children (including the children) are entitled to a 50% discount on 'Pay as you go' activities i.e. casual swim, use of the gym, participation in group exercise classes, court bookings such as Badminton, Squash, Tennis, Table Tennis and casual use of the Athletics Track.
- These discounts apply to the facilities that are managed on the Council's behalf by Freedom Leisure i.e. Perdiswell Leisure Centre, St Johns Sports Centre, Nunnery Wood Sports Complex and the Tennis courts at Gheluvelt Park and Cripplegate Park. The discount does NOT apply to membership fees.
- Discussion should also be considered to take place with Freedom Leisure with respect to reviewing the eligibility criteria for the Advance 50 concessionary scheme, in order to allow access for Kinship Carers and Care Leavers across the three leisure facilities at Perdiswell Leisure Centre, St Johns Sports Centre and Nunnery Wood Sports Complex.

4.4 **Housing & Homelessness**

- Care Leavers get priority 1 (the highest band) if they are tenancy ready and need to move. They are not required to go through the homelessness system which was a change in approach brought about following a care leavers focus group.
- Any young person facing homelessness is supported by a jointly funded specialist officer (county and city council funding) to ensure an appropriate housing solution is found.
- The Social Care Personal Advisors work from Trinity Street one day a week to ensure a joined-up approach is available for the care leavers/young people.
- Housing play an active part in the Worcestershire Corporate Parenting Group and there is a Countywide Young Persons Homelessness Group that is responsible for the development and review of the 16/17 Young Persons and the separate Care Leavers Protocol. The latter is currently being reviewed. This group also jointly commissions young people's housing related support schemes.
- There is also a local agreement regarding council tax and care leavers - the LA cover difference between Council Tax Support and any outstanding balance a care leaver may have, and County will cover those that don't get Council Tax Support at all.

4.5 **Safeguarding**

- Local authorities have a responsibility for safeguarding all children, but there are certain risks that particularly affect children in care and care leavers that corporate parents need to be aware of. Children in care are three times more likely to go missing than children not in care. There are clear processes in place to report missing children, take the appropriate action to find the child, and then to follow up with them when they are found to establish the underlying reasons for going missing. The City Council staff who work directly with children and young people are trained and know how to report a missing child if necessary.
- A proportion of children in local authority care have been victims of modern slavery and they are vulnerable to this happening again. A strong multi-agency approach is in place to protect victims from further risk from their traffickers and preventing trafficking from taking place. The Youth Detached Team Manager works in

partnership with the police and Children's First in planning for this protection and responding if a trafficked child goes missing.

- Children in care are also disproportionately likely to be at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) than those in the general population, though it is important to remember that the vast majority of CSE victims are living at home. While those issues that led young people to need local authority care in the first place may increase their vulnerability to CSE, the experience of care itself can also be significant, especially if the child's placement lacks stability. Those at risk of CSE will need to have clear plans in place to protect them, and all social workers and partners including City Council officers know how to spot signs of risk and deal with them appropriately.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 When a child comes into care, they become 'looked after' and Worcestershire County Council (WCC) becomes their Corporate Parent. The same is true for our Care Leavers. This means that everyone who works for Worcestershire County Council, in any capacity, its elected members and its partners - i.e. Health, Police, District Councils, housing providers and the voluntary sector – in fact all those who play any part in making decisions for children in Worcestershire – have a special and important responsibility in fulfilling the corporate parent role and safeguarding of children and young people.
- 5.2 Corporate parent responsibilities are intended to encourage people and organisations to do as much as they can towards improving the lives of care experienced and looked after children, so that they: feel in control of their lives, and are able to overcome the barriers they face. It is important that all Worcester City Council councillor's play their role in this and members of all committees have a responsibility to consider how reports before them impact upon children in care and care leavers.

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Background Papers: None