

North Tyneside Council

Report to Cabinet

Date: 22 February 2021

Title: Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy

Portfolio(s): Children, Young People and Learning	Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Peter Earley	
Report from Service Area:	Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding	
Responsible Officer:	Jacqui Old	(Tel: (0191) 6437317
Wards affected:	All	

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

1.1.1 This report introduces the strategy for children in our care and care leavers, which sets out the Authority's responsibilities to children in the Authority's care and those cared for in their childhoods. It makes clear the Authority's ambitions for them and the things the Authority will do to provide them with support to thrive into adulthood.

The strategy

1.1.2 The role that the Authority plays in caring for children is one of the most important things it does. In this context, the Authority is referred to as being the 'corporate parent' of these children and young people, and the critical question that should be asked in adopting the presented strategy is: 'would this be good enough for my child?'.

1.1.3 The ethos of corporate parenting is that everyone in the Authority and partner services take responsibility for promoting and delivering the vision for the children in our care and care leavers. It is recognised that the children in the Authority's care have the same needs as every child – to be loved, cared for and to feel safe. It is also acknowledged that children may have unique challenges due to the abuse or neglect they have suffered.

1.1.4 The ambition of the strategy is to promote a strong corporate parenting ethos recognising that the care system is not just about keeping children safe, but also to promote recovery, resilience and well-being. This strong corporate parenting vision means that everyone is concerned about children and care leavers as if they were their own. This is evidenced by a culture where officers do all that is reasonably possible to ensure the Authority is the best 'parent' it can be to the child or young person. In order to evidence the strongest corporate parenting practice, it is vital that all parts of the Authority, beyond those directly responsible for care and pathway planning, recognise they also have a key role.

1.1.5 Statutorily the corporate parenting principles apply only to local authorities. The statutory Director of Children's Services and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning in North Tyneside, work to ensure that relevant partners understand how they

can assist the Authority in applying the principles of good corporate parenting, in relation to the services those partners provide. 'Relevant partners' include local policing bodies and Chief Officers of Police, local probation boards and probation services, youth offending teams, clinical commissioning groups, NHS England, schools and educational institutions.

1.1.6 There have been no objections to the strategy which will, if agreed, be in place across all wards in North Tyneside and will remain in place until review in 2023.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Cabinet approve the Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy for the period 2021 – 2023 at Appendix 1 of this report.

1.3 Forward Plan:

Twenty-eight days' notice of this report has been given and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 20th January 2021.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

1.4.1 This report relates to the following priorities in the 2020-2024 Our North Tyneside Plan:

Our People will:

- Be listened to so that their experience helps the Council work better for residents.
- Be ready for school – giving our children and their families the best start in life.
- Be ready for work and life – with the right skills and abilities to achieve their full potential, economic independence and meet business needs.
- Be healthy and well – with the information, skills and opportunities to maintain and improve their health, well-being and independence, especially if they are carers.
- Be cared for, protected and supported if they become vulnerable including if they become homeless.
- Be encouraged and enabled to, whenever possible, be more independent, to volunteer and to do more for themselves and their local communities.

Our Places will:

- Be great places to live by focusing on what is important to local people, such as by tackling the derelict properties that are blighting some of our neighbourhoods.
- Offer a good choice of quality housing appropriate to need, including affordable homes that will be available to buy or rent.
- Benefit from the completion of the North Tyneside Living project and by North Tyneside Council's housing stock being decent, well managed and its potential use maximised.
- Provide a clean, green, healthy, attractive, safe and sustainable environment. This will involve creating a cycle friendly borough, investing in energy efficiency schemes and by encouraging more recycling.
- Have an effective transport and physical infrastructure - including our roads, pavements, street lighting, drainage and public transport.
- Be a thriving place of choice for visitors through the promotion of our award-winning parks, beaches, festivals, and seasonal activities.

Our Economy will:

- Grow by supporting new businesses and building on our strengths, including our existing world class companies, and small and growing enterprises.
 - Be business friendly, ensuring the right skills and conditions are in place to support investment, and create and sustain new high-quality jobs and apprenticeships for working age people.
 - Continue to support investment in our business parks, units and Town Centres.

1.4.2 The priorities listed below within the Children & Young People's Plan 2021 – 2025 are also key for improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers and align to this strategy.

Outcome 1: I am Safe

Priority 1.1: Ensure children and young people are living safely

Outcome 2: I am Healthy

Priority 2.1: Support children to have a healthy early childhood

Outcome 3: I have Opportunities

Priority 3.1: Narrow the gap in educational outcomes

Priority 3.2: Ensure the right support for children and young people with disabilities and additional needs

Outcome 4: I have a Voice

Priority 4.1: Support children to be active citizens

Outcome 5: I am Happy

Priority 5.1: Develop resilience, confidence and independence in children and young people

1.4.3 The children and young people who are cared for by the Authority are some of the most vulnerable residents in North Tyneside and the areas of North Tyneside Plan listed above and the Children and Young People's Plan, have a direct impact on their current and future wellbeing. As with all parents, the Authority wishes to see children cared for, follow their dreams and ambitions into adulthood, becoming productive and responsible citizens with solid support networks and the ability to contribute to the future of North Tyneside.

1.5 Information:

1.5.1 North Tyneside Council has not experienced the increase in Children in Care that regional partners and statistical neighbours have during the Covid 19 pandemic. There are 285 children in care and 157 young people supported by care leaving services on the date of writing this report.

1.5.2 These children and young people are cared for in a variety of settings including wherever safe to do so, within their own families or networks, supported by our specialist fostering team. The Authority has responsibility for children who live in foster care with mainstream foster carers and others who live in children's homes. As the young people mature, the Authority as corporate parent encourages them to remain living in their stable foster homes as long as each young person wants under the 'staying put' scheme. When young

people are ready to move on, the Authority has a dedicated accommodation service which offers an excellent range of options to young people.

- 1.5.3 Children and young people in the Authority's care receive health assessments and support and advice from dedicated staff. This helps young people to be as healthy as possible and to develop the skills and confidence to manage their own health needs as they mature.
- 1.5.4 Children in the Authority's care are supported to maintain stable education and are assisted by dedicated staff who work alongside schools and colleges to promote the best outcomes for the children. Despite this young people who have experienced care often struggle to gain and sustain employment and the global pandemic has further impacted negatively on this outcome. The Authority recognises that significantly more focus is required to aid them with this.
- 1.5.5 The strategy seeks to provide the culture and circumstances in which each child and young person can be supported with a stable home, a family and professional network that is mutually supportive of the child, the best health and educational opportunities and high expectations of their ability to follow their dreams. The Authority wants children in its care to experience genuine affection, acceptance of who they are and belief in them.
- 1.5.6 The strategy has identified a range of key priorities. The overarching priorities are: -
- The Authority will only bring children into care when it cannot be made safe for them to stay at home.
 - The Authority will work with each child's network to try and keep every child within their network.
 - The Authority will support all adults who care for children to do so safely.
 - The Authority wants all children to live in safe homely and comfortable homes.
 - The Authority wants all children to be able to build enduring relationships with consistent adults.
 - The Authority will work with children in care to stop them having to tell their story over and over.
 - The Authority wants all children to achieve their best in education, and will work with them and their school, college or workplace to support this.
 - The Authority wants all children in its care, and those who have left its care help the Authority to get better at caring for children.
- 1.5.7 There are then a range of further actions under the following themes: -
- Our Children and Young People
 - Relationships
 - Virtual School and Health (Health, Information & Advice, Virtual School and Emotional Wellbeing)
 - Learning from Care Experienced Young People
 - Model of Practice
 - Care Leavers
 - Children in Care Council
- 1.5.8 The implementation of the plan will be overseen by the Children in Care Council and the Corporate Parenting Forum. The Multi-Agency Looked After Panel (MALAP) is the key delivery mechanism. On an annual basis, progress against the strategic priorities will be reported to the Children and Young People's Partnership Board.

1.6 Decision options:

1.6.1 The following decision options are available for consideration by Cabinet

Option 1

Cabinet agree and adopt the Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy 2021-2023 as the document to set out the strategic ambition for children in care and care leavers in North Tyneside.

Option 2

Cabinet does not agree to adopt the Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy 2021-2023 and requests officers to consider any issue(s) raised by Cabinet.

Option 1 is the recommended option.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

Option 1 demonstrates the Authority's commitment to its corporate parenting responsibilities and best aids the continued development of service improvements for children in its care and those who have experienced care.

1.8 Appendices:

Appendix: Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2021-2023

1.9 Contact officers:

Jodie Henderson Senior Manager Children in care (Resources) 0191 6437388
Julie Firth Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Children's Services 0191 6438910
David Dunford, (Acting) Senior Business Partner, Strategic Finance 0191 6437027

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

The strategy does not include any additional financial or human resources pressures within the Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding (HECS) service area.

2.2 Legal

2.2.1 The Authority has a statutory duty to provide corporate parenting to children and young people in its care or who have been in the care of the Authority in accordance with: -.

- Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Part 3 of the Children Act 1989
- The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 (the Care Leavers Regulations)
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

2.2.2 The way in which each local authority does this is not defined in law, but it is considered best practice to adhere to seven basic principles. These are: -

- 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.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

2.3.1 Internal Consultation

The production of the strategy has included the consultation with groups representing children in care. These have included the Children in Care Council and the care leavers consultation 'New Belongings' which was specifically designed to improve the voice of care leavers in strategic planning.

2.3.2 External Consultation/Engagement

As above, the production of the strategy has included consultation with internal groups of children in care and care leavers and includes within the body the expressed views of children who have experienced care. It has also drawn upon national, published consultation with children in care and care experienced young people. It has also been produced in consultation with the multi-agency looked after children partnership (MALAP) in North Tyneside.

2.4 Human rights

There are no human rights implications directly arising from this report.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

It is acknowledged that some children and young people in our care or previously cared for, do have some additional protected characteristics and some by virtue of their experiences are likely to be disadvantaged. Given this, due regard has been and will continue to be, given to their protected characteristics during the ongoing development and delivery of this strategy.

There is a commitment to undertake Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs), on specific projects or initiatives delivered as part of strategy implementation.

2.6 Risk management

While no additional risk has been identified directly arising from this strategy, the strategy will, through delivery of the priorities, reduce risks to children in care and care leavers and improve life chances.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications directly arising from this report.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

There are no environment and sustainability implications directly arising from this report.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Chief Executive X
- Head(s) of Service X
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s) X
- Chief Finance Officer X
- Monitoring Officer X
- Head of Corporate Strategy and Customer Service X