

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People	Ref No: CYP04 (17/18)
February 2018	Key Decision: Yes
Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy (2018 to 2021)	Part I or Part II: Part I
Report by Director of Family Operations	Electoral Division(s): All

Summary

The Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy (2018 to 2021) describes how the County Council will develop and improve current arrangements for Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers at all stages of their multi-agency care journey; and provides the framework via an annually produced multi-agency implementation plan to achieve that change. It builds on and develops the achievements of the previous strategy (2014 - 17) and enshrines the commitment to being a successful corporate parent and working with partners to provide the best possible outcomes for the children in the care of the County Council.

Recommendation

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People is recommended to approve the adoption of the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy (2018 – 2021) as set out in Appendix 1 for implementation.

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 As corporate parents, the goal for Children Looked After and Care Leavers in West Sussex is that they are happy, healthy, and safe and have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. This goal is accomplished by ensuring they are provided with effective support, with special attention given to those judged most vulnerable.
- 1.2 The previous Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy (2014-17) sets out the mechanisms for West Sussex elected members, officers and the County Council's strategic partners to fulfil their duties and responsibilities, as corporate parents of Children Looked After and Care Leavers in West Sussex.
- 1.3 As the existing strategy expired at the end of 2017, the co-production of a new multi-agency strategy provided the opportunity to build and develop on the successes of the original strategy whilst also ensuring it reflects current good practice. In addition by embedding some of the recommendations from the Ofsted improvement plan, this will enable the County Council to continue to improve services and outcomes for CLA and care leavers.

2. Proposal

2.1 The overall purpose and aim of this strategy is simple: to ensure that those children and young people who are looked after have everything that good parents want for their children. In order to achieve this, the refreshed strategy has maintained many of the original principles from the original strategy, but developed these to produce a document which reflects a whole system and integrated approach to supporting Children and Families.

2.2 The underlying principles for this strategy are as follows:

- The strategy will relate to all CLA and care leavers in West Sussex, including West Sussex CLA placed out of our geographical area.
- Views and wishes of CLA and care leavers themselves will be central to the support provided, building on the young people's strengths and encouraging them to develop positive aspirations for their future that they can fulfil.
- It will include all children looked after and will include those placed for adoption, children subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs), Child Arrangements Orders (CAOs) and those transitioning to become Care Leavers.
- In line with 'Keep on caring'¹ this document recognises the statutory duty to care leavers to age 25.
- This is a partnership document, led by the County Council but owned by key partners and stakeholders as corporate parents and by children and young people themselves
- The strategy will be action-focused in terms of improving life chances, outcomes and opportunities for all CLA and care leavers, thereby enabling them to achieve their full potential.
- Whenever it is safe and possible to achieve, the aim is to intervene to keep families together, thereby minimising the number of children who need to be looked after.
- All looked after children will be 'in the right place at the right time' and will have a care plan or pathway plan (depending on their age) which provides them with stability for the present and future.

2.3 The strategy is underpinned by a newly updated Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for children who are looked after and care leavers (appendix 2). The purpose of the JSNA is to understand the social care, health, education and accommodation needs, therefore helping to identify priorities for planning and action to address those needs.

2.4 The strategy will be supported by a multi-agency implementation plan. The areas of focus of the implementation plan are as follows:

- Health and wellbeing
- Education, employment and training
- Placements and residential care
- Planning for permanence
- Staying safe and building resilience
- Transition, leaving care and preparing for adulthood

¹ [Keep on caring: supporting young people from care to independence](#) - a cross-government strategy to transform support for young people leaving care.

- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- The voice of the child and our commitment as corporate parents

2.5 The annual multi agency implementation plan for the strategy will be developed and owned by the Multi Agency Child Looked After Implementation Group (MACLAIG). This group brings together officer representation from West Sussex County Council (chaired by the Head of Children's Social Care) with representatives of Clinical Commissioning Groups, Health Providers, Education, Communities and District and Borough Councils to co-ordinate the offer and champion the needs of children who are looked after.

2.6 The action plan will be SMART; and progress in delivering the identified actions will be monitored by MACLAIG. The Corporate Parenting Panel will also maintain scrutiny and oversight via regular progress updates.

3. Resources

3.1 There are no additional calls upon resources as a result of this strategy being adopted. Current resources will be reprioritised in an effective manner to meet the aims of the strategy and costs will be met from the current budget provision.

3.2 This strategy represents good value for money as it will ensure the service is economic, efficient and effective. Resources will be targeted to the areas of greatest need so as to have the greatest beneficial impact on children and young people.

4. Consultation

4.1 The strategy was developed through MACLAIG in consultation with key partners and stakeholders. The strategy and action plan has been scrutinised by the Children in Care Council (CICC), a group of young people who are looked after that act as representatives for all CLA within West Sussex, and the Care Leavers Forum. The CICC and Care Leavers forum will continue to oversee the delivery of the strategy, ensuring that the voice of the child is central and able to influence issues which are important to them, to comment on, and influence how services are developed.

4.2 The draft strategy and implementation plan were considered by Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel at their meeting on 19th July; Panel Members supported adoption of the strategy. The Panel have also been kept updated on the development of the implementation plan at subsequent meetings. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People has been briefed throughout the development of the strategy.

4.3 The draft strategy has been circulated to the Children and Maternity boards of the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) in West Sussex as part of the consultation which has helped to ensure the strategic ambitions for both the County Council and CCGs are aligned. These groups will also be the governance route for monitoring progress against the actions that the CCG has the lead responsibility for.

5. Risk Management Implications

- 5.1 A failure to implement this strategy will result in a lack of integrated planning for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. This in turn could result in poor outcomes for these children and young people.
- 5.2 The services which support children who are looked after and care leavers are provided by the Local Authority and a range of other organisations, meaning there is the risk of an un-coordinated approach to service provision. As such, having a multi-agency partnership strategy, strongly supported by all organisations involved, is the only way to be able to effect changes in a co-ordinated way and mitigate against this risk.
- 5.3 Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked after Children (DoE/DoH 2015) recommends that the needs of the Looked after Children population should be identified through the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment process. Renewing the CLA and care leavers strategy therefore demonstrates the County Council's compliance with guidance and best practice. It will be reviewed as part of a statutory inspection.

6. Other Options Considered

- 6.1 Do nothing - the current strategy for CLA and Care Leavers expired at the end of 2017. The Children Act 2004 introduced a duty (section 10) on local authorities, health, education and other relevant children's services partners to co-operate at a strategic level. If the strategy is not renewed it will be difficult to demonstrate the County Council's compliance with this duty and monitor the impact of our work as corporate parents.

7. Equality Duty

- 7.1 Children who have become looked after are more likely to have negative life experiences that result in poorer outcomes in terms of health (including emotional health and wellbeing), lower educational attainment, poor employment prospects and are more likely to be involved with the justice system.
- 7.2 The local authority has a duty (under The Children Act 2004, section 11) to make arrangements to ensure that they take account of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the discharge of their own functions. The strategy will help to ensure that the children who are looked after in West Sussex have the opportunity to redress any inequality they could have encountered by way of their experiences before coming into care.
- 7.3 Being a child who is looked after is not a protective characteristic in its own right, children in care may have experienced discrimination on the grounds of their age, sex, race, disability, religion or belief. The strategy is explicit in championing services for all looked after children and will therefore contribute to the elimination of unlawful discrimination, harassment or any victimisation towards children who are looked after and advance their equality of opportunity.

8. Social Value

8.1 Not applicable.

9. Crime and Disorder Act Implications

9.1 Not Applicable

10. Human Rights Implications

10.1 The United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child recognises that children and young people have the right that their views and opinions should be taken seriously in matters that affect them (UN Convention, 1989, Article 12). There is likely to be a positive impact on the Human Rights of Young people as a result of this strategy (refer to Objective 2) which aims for Children and Young People to participate more fully in decision making.

Annie MacIver

Director of Family Operations

Contact:

Jane Taylor, Commissioning Manager, Children Looked After
0330 222 3741.

Appendices

[Appendix 1](#) - Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy 2018 – 2021

[Appendix 2](#) - Joint Strategic Needs Assessment