

<b>Cabinet</b>  26 July 2023	 <b>TOWER HAMLETS</b>
<b>Report of:</b> James Thomas, Corporate Director of Children and Culture	<b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted
<b>Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023 – 2028</b>	

<b>Lead Member</b>	Councillor Maium Talukdar (Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning)
<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Tracy Stanley, Strategy & Policy Officer (Children & Culture)
<b>Wards affected</b>	All
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No
<b>Reason for Key Decision</b>	N/A
<b>Forward Plan Notice Published</b>	21/04/2023
<b>Exempt information</b>	N/A
<b>Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome</b>	1. A better deal for children and young people: aspiration, education and skills

### Executive Summary

The Corporate Parenting Strategy will outline a vision for the future with a set of priorities; providing a roadmap of how we will work with young people over the strategy's five-year lifecycle to ensure they have every opportunity to develop, realise their aspirations and thrive.

### Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is asked to:

1. Approve the final version of the strategy following its progression through the council's decision making process.

## **1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 When a child comes into care, or is under 25 and was looked-after for a certain period of time, the Local Authority (LA) becomes their corporate parent. This is a shared responsibility and every member of staff (senior to front line) and elected members share this, and play a part in ensuring our young people thrive. This strategy will outline our approach to ensuring that the children and young people who are or have been in our care are given the best possible opportunity to achieve their full potential.

## **2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 The Council could choose not to have a Corporate Parenting Strategy but it will provide a framework for delivering on priorities for our care experienced children for the all council departments and partners. Without a strategy progress may be put at risk as there would not be an agreed vision and commitments that can steer work over the next five years.

## **3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

- 3.1 The strategy is part of a range of work being led by the council which is focused on strengthening and developing our corporate parenting ethos. Several reports are being taken to committees during July 2023 to provide information on progress, plans and proposals for the future. These are:
- Corporate Parenting Strategy – as covered within this report.
  - Corporate Parenting Commitments – the focus of this report will be a proposal to adopt ‘Care Experienced’ as a protected characteristic akin to race, religion or disability (as per the recommendation in the Independent Care Review).
    - As the Care Review highlights ‘many care experienced people face discrimination, stigma and prejudice in their day to day lives’. By assessing the impact of future decisions, services and policies on care experienced young people (through our Equality Impact Assessment processes) we could help to tackle inequality and improve outcomes for our young people. The strategy will include reference to this proposal and any other commitments put forward in the report.
  - Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022 – in alignment with previous years this report will provide information about progress the board has achieved over the last year (including the work undertaken with Foster Carers and the Children Living in Care Council) and the impact this has had.
- 3.2 The strategy will take account of the national and regional strategy and policy context, including:

- The new Ofsted judgement which is focused on experiences and progress of care leavers. The judgement was introduced in January 2023 for all local authorities who have had at least one 'Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services' (ILACS) inspection.
- The Independent review of children's social care (May 2022). The review looked at the needs, experiences and outcomes of the children supported by social care. The final report and recommendations were published in May 2022.
- The Government's response to the independent review 'Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation' was published in Feb 2023. This sets out the government's vision for reform of children's social care.
- The Pan London Care Leavers Compact which provides a framework for developing consistency, breadth and quality in the support offered to London's Care Leavers.

3.3 At a local level, the Corporate Parenting Strategy will be informed by, and developed in alignment with, the following:

- Tower Hamlets Strategic Plan 2022-2026
- The Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2026
- Recruitment Strategy for Foster Carers 2022-2025
- Youth Justice Plan 2022-2023
- The Children & Families Strategy 2019-2024
- SEND Strategy 2020-2024
- Learning & Achievement Strategy for 14 to 25 Year Olds 2019-2024

3.4 A Corporate Parenting Strategy Steering Group was set up in Autumn 2022 to help guide development of the strategy through monthly meetings. The Corporate Parenting Board also oversees progress and is provided with regular updates.

3.5 A co-production approach, with care experienced children and young people, has been taken to developing the strategy. The steering group reviewed several options for supporting young people to be involved from an early stage and then commissioned a specialist provider to work with them during the Spring 2023 half term. The young people were supported to hold discussion workshops and then make a film focused on what mattered most to them and what they would like to see in the future.

3.6 Feedback from the workshops and film project led to the development of a set of 'key messages' which are central to the strategy. A review was also carried out of all feedback coming from engagement and involvement with care experienced young people over the last 12-18 months (including from events, meetings and other activities). Young people then reviewed the draft messages and agreed the current version. We will continue to seek their involvement throughout the development of the strategy and as we prepare for the launch in Autumn 2023.

- 3.7 A wide range of consultation events and meetings with stakeholders were arranged between February and May 2023. The following have taken place or are planned:
- Information & awareness presentations on the development of the strategy provided through managers forums, team meetings, foster care support meetings and meetings of Children Living in Care Council meetings (during Jan – Mar 2023).
  - One to one interviews with key members of staff to gather background information on issues, current work programmes and initiatives (during Feb 2023).
  - Targeted feedback from children in our care and care experienced young people – professionals gathering feedback from groups who are 'harder to reach' (May 2023).
  - Stakeholder workshops with representatives from council teams and partner organisations, and with frontline children's social care professionals (April & May 2023)
  - Foster Carers Support Groups – two consultation sessions on the strategy (May 2023).
  - Members Sessions – two events for Councillors are being offered. They will focus on the role of Councillors in promoting and supporting corporate parenting across the council and with partners (May 2023).
- 3.8 The emerging draft strategy has been shared regularly with the steering group and will be made available to all stakeholders during May / June 2023 for further review and amendments as necessary.
- 3.9 A launch event for the final version of the strategy is planned for the October 2023 half term. The details are currently taking shape but it will provide an opportunity to come together with children and young people and share the vision for the future as well as promoting sign up to the pledge. We aim to create a dynamic and inspirational event which puts some of our commitments into action.
- 3.10 Governance arrangements for monitoring the delivery of the strategy will be confirmed through the steering group and Corporate Parenting Board.

## **4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 An evidence base was developed to inform the strategy and this includes data and insight about the protected characteristic groups. We have included local data where possible, as well as information from regional and national research and reports. The Strategy reflects the findings from the evidence base and seeks to help reduce inequalities and address issues through the priorities and actions.

- 4.2 Known challenges for care experienced children and young people include that they are more likely to have a lower Attainment 8 score at Key Stage 4 (see definition below<sup>i</sup>). This was 20.7 in 2021-22 in Tower Hamlets, compared to 49.8 for all students. They are also more likely to be 'not in education, employment or training (EET) or activity not known' with 10.6% of children in our care aged 16/17 in this position in March 2022, compared to 3.6% for all 16/17 year olds (it should be noted that the number of children in our care that the percentage is based on is very small).
- 4.3 Actions within the strategy that help to respond to these findings include how we act as the education champions for every one of our children including via the work of the Virtual School. There are also actions focused on increasing EET related opportunities.
- 4.4 Data on the prevalence of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability in Tower Hamlets shows that 34.9% of children in our care have an Education, Health & Care Plan and 20.9% are with SEN Support. Actions within the strategy include improving how health assessments offered to our children are made available and carried out and use of the 'Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire' to help identify any health needs or issues at the earliest possible stage so that our children don't experience delays in being supported.

## **5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
  - Consultations,
  - Environmental (including air quality),
  - Risk Management,
  - Crime Reduction,
  - Safeguarding.
  - Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

## **6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

- 6.1 This report is has no direct financial implications

## **7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES**

- 7.1 Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 sets out the corporate parenting principles to which a local authority must have regard when carrying out functions relating to children and young persons who are or were looked after by them.
- 7.2 The principles set out in the Act are:

- (a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
- (b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- (c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- (d) 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;
- (e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- (f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
- (g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

7.3 Statutory guidance 'Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked-after Children and Care Leavers' was published in February 2018.

7.4 This report demonstrates the Council's compliance with the above legislation and guidance,

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## **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

### **Linked Report**

- Draft Tower Hamlets Corporate Parenting Strategy

### **Appendices**

- NONE.

### **Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012**

- NONE.

### **Officer contact details for documents:**

Tracy Stanley, Strategy & Policy Officer, Children & Culture

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<sup>i</sup> The Attainment 8 score is a way of measuring how well pupils do in Key Stage 4. The 8 subjects which make up Attainment 8 include English and maths. Each grade a pupil gets is assigned a point score from 9 (the highest) to 1 (the lowest). A school's Attainment 8 score is the average of all the scores of its eligible pupils.