

Item No. 14.	Classification: Open	Date: 9 February 2016	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2016-2019	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Victoria Mills, Children and Schools	

FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR VICTORIA MILLS, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND SCHOOLS

In Southwark we want to do our absolute best for all our children and young people. This goes beyond providing them with a safe home and financial support, it means being honest, open and trustworthy and providing them with love and guidance. It means making the most of the knowledge and resources we have to help them to be the best they can be and be prepared for the everyday challenges of life. It means keeping our door open, picking them up when they are down and treating them with the respect they deserve, as they find their way in the world. It means championing them and celebrating them and not defining them by the care system that they are part of, through no fault of their own, but as the brilliant and unique children and young people they are.

The corporate parenting committee regularly meets with Speakerbox, our Children in Care Council. They told us that communication with social workers, the quality of placements, family contact (particularly siblings) and respecting their right to privacy are some of the things that matter most to them. These key areas, and other feedback from our children and young people, have shaped our vision and strategy.

Through the delivery of this strategy we will keep our children and young people at the heart of what we do, regardless of the challenges we face in local government, and give them the love and support they need to achieve the best possible outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That cabinet agree the Children in care and care leavers strategy 2016-2019.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. Through its role as a Corporate Parent, the Council and its partners have a responsibility to ensure that the life chances of children in care and care leavers are maximised in terms of health, educational attainment, and access to training and employment and to aid their transition to a secure and productive adulthood.
3. The Council Plan and Health and Wellbeing Board aim to ensure that every child and young person have the Best Start. As well as this, the Children and Young People's Plan, 2013-2016, also includes Safety and Stability and Choice and Control as priority areas.
4. The Children in care and care leavers strategy builds on these priority areas, research, feedback from children and young people, providers and staff, and presents a strategic vision and framework for the improvement and delivery of services for children and care and care leavers, for whom the local authority and its partners are their 'corporate parent'.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

5. As of January 2016 there are 475 children and young people in care and 350 care

leavers. Most children and young people come into care as a result of abuse and neglect. Some stay in care for a short period of time whilst issues are addressed at home, whilst others move into foster care on a longer term basis or are permanently removed from their birth families for adoption or to move to friends and family care. Generally, young people leave care at 18, though some may be able to stay with their foster carers until the age of 21 through the government's Staying Put¹ arrangement.

6. The Strategy sets out the key strategic aims and priorities for the delivery of support to ensure that children and young people in our care are well supported through their journey into care, whilst they are in our care and as they make the transition to adulthood and independence.
7. The Strategy reflects our duties to children and young people as their corporate parents and provides the council and key partners with the opportunity to be more ambitious for children in care and care leavers in Southwark, recognising that responsibilities as corporate parents extend beyond the remit of children's social care to housing, education, employment, health, community safety, welfare and the community.
8. The Strategy includes the following strategic aims:
 - Safely reduce the number of children in care
 - Improve the health and wellbeing of children in care and care leavers
 - Improve the quality of care and effectiveness of our workforce, leadership, management and governance.
9. In following these aims, the Strategy is aligned to Southwark's Families Matter strategy, aiming to prevent moves into care altogether and the ambitions of the joint NHS Clinical Commissioning Group and Southwark Council Children and Young People's Wellbeing Strategic Framework, particularly in relation to improving the mental and emotional health and wellbeing of children in care and care leavers.
10. Improving the quality of care means ensuring we are delivering our statutory duties well and hearing and acting upon the voice of children and young people. We will continue to deliver a child-centred and multiagency approach to deliver the best possible care and ensure the voice of the child is heard in outcome focused care planning and pathway planning.
11. In the context of the above strategic aims the Strategy includes 10 strategic priorities, which will guide improved practice for children and young people in care and care leavers. These are as follows:
 - a) Children and young people have a say and their voice is heard
 - b) Develop our support and interventions with families to keep children and young people safe, enabling them to remain with or return to their families
 - c) Children and young people achieve timely, permanent care arrangements in safe, secure and loving homes
 - d) More children and young people feel safe and secure in their placements and live closer to home, in provision that meets their needs
 - e) Increase the focus on physical and mental health and social and emotional wellbeing through the development and delivery of our services
 - f) Foster carers, adoptive parents and special guardians feel well supported to deliver the best care
 - g) More children and young people make good educational progress and achieve the best possible outcomes at Key Stage 2 and 4
 - h) Continue to safeguard children and young people who are risk of CSE, missing,

¹ DfE, 2013, [Staying Put arrangements for care leavers aged 18 and above](#)

- criminal activity and radicalisation
- i) Young people leave care well prepared for independent living
- j) More care leavers are in education, employment and/or training.

12. Delivery of the strategy will be monitored through the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Policy implications

- 13. The Strategy is based on the policy driving principles set out in the Children Act 1989 and the UN Convention on Rights of the Child (1992 in the UK) that the child's best interests must be paramount and "every child has the right to express their views feelings and wishes in matters affecting them and to have their views considered and taken seriously".
- 14. It supports the principles established in Every Child Matters (2003) and the Children and Young Persons Act 2008; to improve the stability of placements and improve the educational experience and attainment of young people in local authority care or those about to leave care.
- 15. In line with Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015) the Southwark Safeguarding Children Board provides inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. It emphasises that safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone who comes into contact with children and the importance of thorough assessment, prompt action and early intervention.
- 16. In their inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers Ofsted expects that in a good authority:
 - Children and young people looked after, those returning home and those moving to or living in permanent placements outside of their immediate birth family have their welfare safeguarded and promoted. Children and young people are helped to live in permanent homes or families with unnecessary delay. The development of safe and stable relationships with adults is central to planning for their futures.
 - Young people leaving care or who have left care receive help and support tailored to their individual needs and comparable to what they would receive from a reasonable parent. They are provided with opportunities, support and help to enable them to move successfully to adulthood.

Community impact statement

- 17. The Strategy has been developed through feedback from children and young people and representatives from Speakerbox, our Children in Care Council, via the Children's Rights Team, research and consultation with staff, partners and providers.
- 18. The delivery of the Strategy ensures that children and young people in care and care leavers are supported to achieve positive outcomes whilst in care and when they leave care. It enables the council, and partners, to effectively deliver duties as a corporate parent and commit to taking a council wide approach to this.
- 19. A key underpinning principle of the Strategy will be to ensure that policy and practice embeds consideration of equalities and human rights throughout the delivery of our child-centred services. To evidence this, an equalities analysis has been undertaken of this strategy to ensure that there is compliance with the council's Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This is attached at Appendix 2.

Resource implications

20. The delivery of the Strategy will be supported by existing resources available within both the local authority and partners. There are no immediate financial implications over and above existing allocated funds.
21. The strategy aims to safely reduce the numbers coming into care, keep children and young people in placements that are closer to and in the borough, improve employment and training outcomes for care leavers. Over time, and with improved partnership working across the council and key partners such as the Clinical Commissioning Group, this should ensure that services are more cost effective and efficient.

Legal implications

22. Cabinet is being asked to agree the Children in care and care leavers strategy 2016-2019.
23. Working Together 2015² states that local authorities have overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in their area. A number of statutory functions under the 1989 and 2004 Children Acts make this clear. These include specific duties in relation to children in need and children suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, regardless of where they are found, under sections 17 and 47 of the Children Act 1989.
24. Legislation also requires looked after children to have care plans that identify the individual needs of a child and how those needs will be met. Care plans are subject to regular review. Further planning is required for children as they prepare to and as they leave care.
25. The director of children's services and the lead member for children's services in local authorities are the key points of professional and political accountability for the effective delivery of these functions.
26. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined in Working Together as:
 - Protecting children from maltreatment;
 - Preventing impairment of children's health or development;
 - Ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and
 - Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.
27. Under the PSED General Duty public authorities must have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation as well as to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The protected groups covered by the equality duty are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The duty also covers marriage and civil partnerships, but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination.
28. In order to ensure that the strategy demonstrates compliance with the PSED an equalities analysis has been undertaken. It concludes that the strategy presents no adverse impact on any persons with protected characteristics. It identifies issues for particular groups of children in care and highlights the steps being taken to ensure that the needs of these children are met. Member's are referred to the equalities analysis which is at Appendix 2.

² [HM Government, March 2015, Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)

Financial implications

29. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Consultation

30. In 2013, the Children and Young People's Plan was published, following consultation with more than 1000 children, young people, their families and carers who in the report 1,000 Journeys talked about what they thought was important and what they wanted from services to help them thrive. The Strategy builds on the Best Start, Safety and Stability and Choice and Control priorities within the plan.
31. The strategy was developed based on feedback from consultations with children and young people in care and care leavers through 2014 and 2015. The consultations were primarily conducted through the Children's Rights Team via Speakerbox, our Children in Care Council. This valuable insight has shaped the strategic priorities and the values that underpin these in the Strategy.
32. Engagement has taken place with staff and practitioners and key partners through dedicated consultation sessions, through the Corporate Parenting Committee, the Children in Care Council and the New Belongings Care Leavers Forum.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Children and Young People's Plan	Southwark Council, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	
Link: http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200165/southwarks_children_and_families_trust/1484/children_and_youth_peoples_plan		
1,000 Journeys	Southwark Council, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	
Link: http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200165/southwarks_children_and_families_trust/1484/children_and_youth_peoples_plan		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Draft Children and Care and Care Leavers Strategy, 2016-2019 (circulated separately)
Appendix 2	Equality Analysis: Children in care and care leavers strategy, 2016-2019 (circulated separately)

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Cllr Victoria Mills, Cabinet Member for Children and Schools	
Lead Officer	Rory Patterson, Director, Children's Social Care	
Report Author	Elaine Gunn, Principal Strategy Officer	
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Dated	26 January 2016	
Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	29 January 2016	