

Item No. 5.	Classification: Open	Date: 8 July 2020	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Corporate Parenting Strategy Review	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director of Children & Families	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To note the contents of this report
2. To agree the schedule for delivery of the new Corporate Parenting Strategy.

PURPOSE

3. To advise the corporate parenting committee of the intended schedule for the development of a renewed corporate parenting strategy for 2021-2025 including the changed national policy context since the previous strategy was developed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. The Southwark Council *Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2016-2019*, the corporate parenting strategy, was published in February 2016 following the approval of the council's cabinet. The strategy was drafted in line with the Council Plan 2014-2018, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015-2020 and the Children and Young People's Plan 2013-2016.
5. The strategy set out a vision for every child and young person in the care of the council, or who had left care, which was:

"We want all our children and young people to be safe, happy and healthy, and to enjoy life. We want them to develop into resilient adults who are ready for work and can make a positive contribution to their community. We will provide them with high quality care, support and guidance to ensure they get the best start they need."

The vision was further supported by three strategic aims, 10 strategic priorities and 76 'we wills' statements.

6. Building on the foundations of the existing vision, aims and priorities, the council is working to develop the next iteration of the corporate parenting strategy. The development of a new strategy follows and will align to the revised Council Plan 2018-2022, the Fairer Future's commitments, and the changed legislative and national policy context.

7. Progress towards the development of the new strategy began in late 2019 with the initiation of the Bright Spots Survey for children and young people in our care and those who have left our care. The Bright Spots Survey measures the well-being and quality of our children and young people's experience of care and the support they have received whilst in care and beyond. The tool provides a holistic insight in to the views and experiences of our children and young people which is invaluable in the future development of our services and whole council approach to supporting the life chances of our children. The output of the Bright Spots Survey is due to be completed in July 2020.
8. In addition to the work done previously to understand the views and experiences of our children and young people, the development of a new strategy will also need to include an extended exercise in understanding the short, medium and potential long-term impact of Covid-19 on the health, wellbeing, educational and social development of our children and young people. The strategy must seek to understand and provide the right level of support and new modes of delivery that will ensure the known and potentially unknown impacts are or can be proactively addressed as evidence and understanding of impact develops in future.
9. This will be undertaken by completing a full evaluation of the 2015-2019 strategy; and secondly, building on the results of the Bright Spots survey to undertake a further detailed and meaningful consultation with our children and young people, and other key stakeholders, to understand current needs and aspirations, and those that have changed or been impacted by Covid-19 and ongoing wider social movements, and similar discussions on the necessary reforms of the Council Plan in light of these societal changes. The new corporate parenting strategy will clearly set out the aims and expected impact of the partnership for the next 4 years, and set the highest ambition for our children and young people and our services delivering for them.

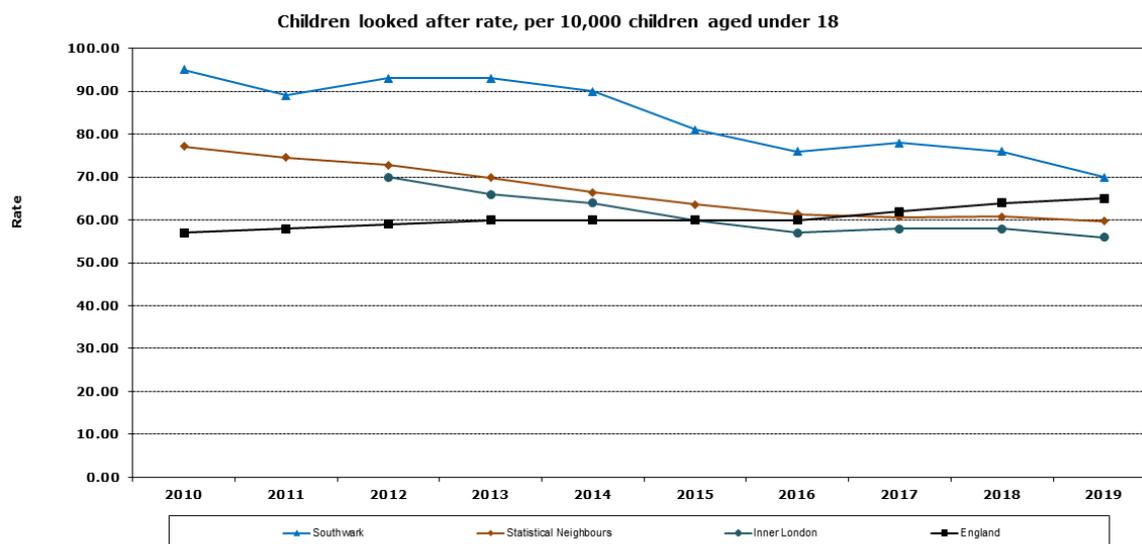
PROVISIONAL HEADLINE REVIEW - 2015-19

10. The three strategic aims of the 2015-19 strategy were:
 - 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.

Safely reduce the number of children in care

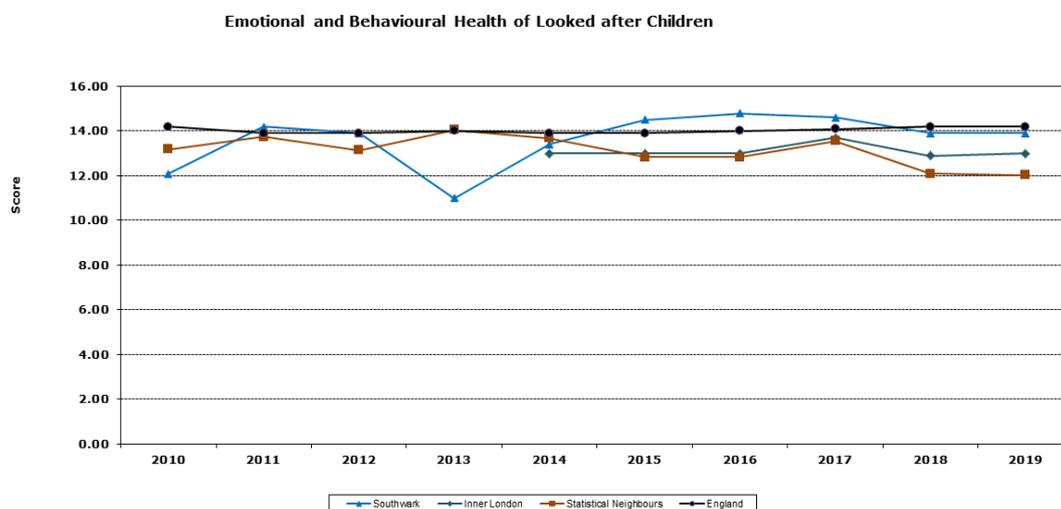
11. Over the course of the strategy the service has continued to build on the previous years by further successfully and safely and appropriately reducing the need for children to enter care so they can remain safely with their families.

12. The rate of children looked after remains higher than comparator averages but has successfully reduced from 81 per 10,000 in 2015 to 70 per 10,000 as at end March 2020 which is commonly used as the key date on which comparisons are made with other local authorities through publicly available data submitted to the Department of Education. This equates to a reduction in the number of children in care from 500 to 459 in the same period, or an 8% reduction.

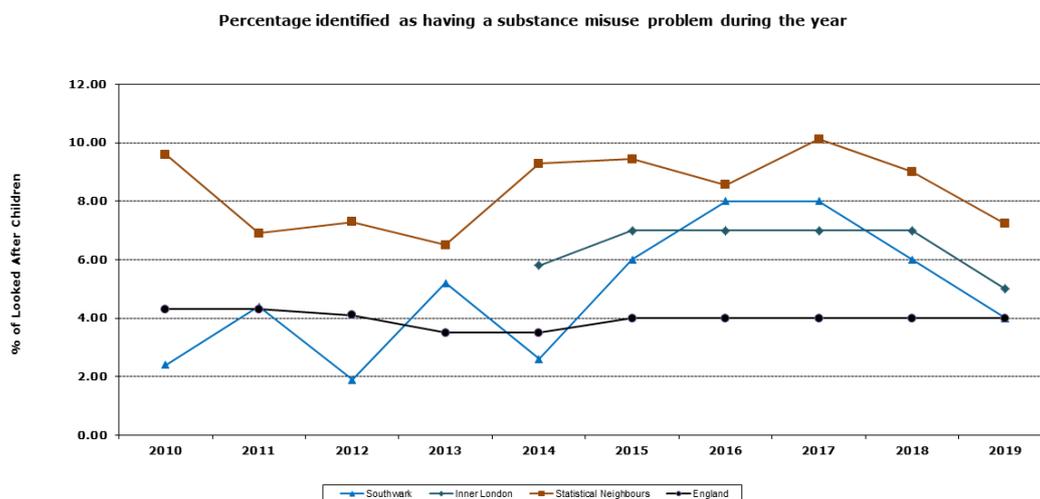


Improve the health and wellbeing of children in care and care leavers

13. The strategy recognises that children in care and care leavers often experience greater issues with their emotional and mental health in comparison to their peers and are also more likely to have experienced a detrimental impact on their physical wellbeing and development.
14. The children in care strength and difficulties questionnaire provides a measure of the emotional and mental health of children in care. Southwark's children have broadly maintained average scores in line with comparator neighbours, which is a positive in the context of the increasingly complex vulnerabilities with which our children and young people present.



15. At the initiation of the strategy we were beginning to witness a significant increase in the proportion of our children and young people who had been identified as having a substance misuse problem, the service has successfully managed this back down during the course of the existing strategy.



16. The service is continuing to maintain high levels of performance in ensuring all children are receiving their age appropriate developmental checks, with a year on year improvement in this performance set out in detail in the annual health report that is presented to this committee.

Improve the quality of care and effectiveness of our workforce, leadership, management and governance

17. The strategy focused on developing our management information systems to ensure more robust oversight of performance and impact on outcomes for children in care and care leavers. The service has developed improved data reporting arrangements which more accurately and comprehensively tracks activity and outcomes for our children in care and care leavers and supports more effective management oversight and scrutiny of our service delivery.
18. The strategy also sought to ensure that young people, especially care leavers have a clearer sense of what they should expect from services and the support offer available to them, in addition to the statutory duties of the local authority. This culminated in the successful development of the Care Leavers Local Offer as part of the Leaving Care Partnership Innovation Project, and the development of a sector leading offer to our care leavers developed by focusing on the social capital available through our local partnerships.
19. Similarly, the strategy promoted continuing investment in the workforce to ensure capacity, skills and experience were maintained in order to continue to deliver for our children and young people. The local authority has politically and corporately been a strong advocate for the service in line with this aim and has continued to support and invest in social work and delivery for children.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

The Council Plan 2018-2022

20. The revised Council Plan restates the ambition to build a fairer future for all the people of Southwark. The specific challenge captured in the plan most relevant to children in

care and care leavers is that of ensuring we provide the environment and support for our children and young people to have the *best start in life*. The new strategy will be critical to the delivery of this priority.

21. Alongside this the 5 core values set out in the Council Plan need to be better integrated into the new Corporate Parenting Strategy and the associated delivery plan. With a priority focus on *treating residents as if they were a valued member of our family; and working for everyone to realise their own potential*.
22. Achieving the aim of *making Southwark a place to be proud of* means delivering outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people, those for whom we are the parent, that any good parent would be truly proud of.

Policy, Legislative & Regulatory Context

23. Since the publication of the existing strategy there has been a significant shift in the national policy context in relation to corporate parenting. This has included changes set out within the DfE Strategy *Keep on Caring 2016*, the *Children and Social Work Act 2017*, the 2018 Statutory Guidance *Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers* and the revised Ofsted Framework *the Inspection of Local Authority Children Services Framework*, the ILACs, published in 2018.
24. *Keep on caring* built on a number of reforms to the care system prior to 2016 such as the publication of the cross-government Care Leaver Strategy in 2013 and the introduction of the Staying Put duty in 2014. Recognising the comparatively poor outcomes for care leavers against their peers, the strategy set out a vision and 5 key outcomes for the continuing reform of support for care leavers.
25. The first of these outcomes is that all young people leaving care should be better prepared and supported to live independently. By:
 - setting out in law for the first time what it means for a local authority to be a good corporate parent
 - creating a new care leaver covenant
 - introducing a new legal duty on local authorities to consult on, and publish information about, services for care leavers and
 - extending existing entitlements so that all care leavers will be able to access support from a local authority Personal Adviser to age 25.
26. The second key outcome is improved access to education, employment and training. By:
 - promoting the take up of supported internships, including through the provision of targeted information to Personal Advisers
 - meet the training costs for care leavers undertaking apprenticeships up to age 25
 - support care leavers' access to, and achievement in, further and higher education, employment and apprenticeships
 - guarantee a place on the National Citizen Service to every child in care or care leaver aged 16 or 17 and
 - consider how best to improve access for care leavers to employment opportunities in government departments and their agencies.
27. The third key outcome is that care leavers should experience stability in their lives, and feel safe and secure. By:
 - committing to introduce 'Staying Close' provision for young people leaving

residential care

- continuing to fund local authorities to support Staying Put arrangements
- providing support for the implementation of the Supported Accommodation Framework
- raising awareness of care leavers' unique status and their entitlements among prison and probation staff through the provision of additional training and
- increasing the funding local authorities will receive for supporting former unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

28. The fourth key outcome is improved access to health support. By:

- through a new Expert Group, produce care pathways, quality standards and models of care for looked after children and care leavers with mental health problems
- use the new Mental Health Services Data Set to inform the future delivery of services to care leavers and
- improve accountability regarding the local provision of health services, for example through Care Quality Commission and Joint Targeted Area inspections.

29. The fifth and final key outcome is that care leavers should achieve financial stability. By:

- exempting care leavers from changes to eligibility for housing support for 18-21 year-olds in Universal Credit
- reviewing the case to extend the exemption to the Shared Accommodation Rate of housing support within Universal Credit, for care leavers to age 25 and
- ensuring, through our review of the Personal Adviser role, that care leavers are able to access advice and support to help them manage their money.

30. A primary intention of *Keep on Caring* was to **“make corporate parenting everyone’s responsibility”** this was to be delivered by the introduction of corporate parenting principles which require all departments within a local authority to recognise their role as corporate parents, encouraging them to look at the services and support that they provide through the lens of what a reasonable parent would do to support their own children. These principles were subsequently set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

31. The Children and Social Work Act 2017, and the 2018 guidance defines, for the first time in law, the role of corporate parents, in addition to expanding and extending support for care leavers, for example through the publication of a ‘local offer for care leavers’ and making personal advisers available for care leavers up to the age of 25.

32. The corporate parenting principles within the Act as set out are that,

“In order to thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:

- *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.”*
33. The newly implemented regulatory framework and evaluation criteria in the ILACs framework embeds the same corporate parenting principles in its judgement of the quality of strategic leadership. The criteria specifically being *the local authority is an active, strong and committed corporate parent – in line with the corporate parenting principles. There is a corporate sense of responsibility for children in care and care leavers and the chief executive leads a local authority that recognises and prioritises the needs of children in all aspects e.g. housing, career opportunities, education and learning.*
34. Collectively the policy framework has brought corporate parenting more to the fore with regard to scrutiny and accountability across a wider spread of local authority services and duties. Meeting the ambitious aims of the new framework requires a strong and partnership led updated corporate parenting strategy that is informed by detailed and meaningful consultation with children, young people, families and carers and that covers all aspects of the local system beyond the traditional understanding of Children’s Services duties.

DELIVERY SCHEDULE

35. The development of the new strategy will follow a staged process. This will include:
- Review and evaluation of the impact of the existing strategy (August 2020)
 - Strategic needs analysis for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, including comprehensive engagement with our children and young people, families and carers. (September 2020)
 - Development of the draft strategy. (October 2020)
 - Consultation. (Final Consultation October 2020)
 - Agreement and development of the implementation, communications and action plan (November 2020)
 - **Launch - (November 2020)**
 - Delivery of the strategy across 2021-2025.
36. The first priority for the service is a more comprehensive evaluation of the existing Strategy against its strategic aims and the commitments given to our children and young people. The full evaluation will build on the headline review above and more fully assess the impact of activity against its overarching aims and review the successful delivery of the 76 ‘we wills’ contained in the strategy.
37. Alongside the evaluation, a comprehensive needs analysis will be undertaken to inform the development of the new strategy. The extended review has a solid foundation in the findings from the Bright Spots Survey and will also hear the direct experience of our children in care and care leavers to understand what has worked for them, and what could have been better in light of the recent seismic changes in day-to-day life for our children and young people.
38. The expectation will be to launch the new strategy in November this year however we need to be very mindful that this may be impacted by the ongoing work the Division is undertaking responding to Covid 19.

Policy implications

39. An updated and ambitious corporate parenting strategy that recognises the shift in national policy context and builds capacity across the local public sector system to deliver outcomes for our children in care and care leavers, will increasingly serve the delivery of the fairer future commitments and the Council Plan.

Community impact statement

40. Successful delivery of a strategy to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers will have a significantly positive impact on the outcomes of one of the most vulnerable groups.

Resource implications

41. There are no resource implications associated with the development of the strategy.

Legal implications

42. There are no legal implications associated with the development of the strategy.

Financial implications

43. There are no financial implications associated with the development of the strategy.

CONCLUSION

44. The national best practice is clear that for any strategy for corporate parenting to be successfully delivered it must be rooted in the voice and experience of our children and young people. Southwark Children's Services has a history of positive engagement which will be built on to develop the renewed strategy.
45. The major challenge and opportunity for the borough is to continue to build on the successes to date and achieve the ambition set out in *Keep on caring* to see Corporate Parenting successfully embedded across not just Children's Services, or those other local authority services directly linked to delivery, but across the whole authority, partners and the local community. Delivering whole system ownership and ambition for corporate parenting will be the underpinning aim of the new strategy, to set high expectations of our children and young people, provide them every opportunity to achieve their potential, and every support necessary.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Previous corporate parenting strategy – cabinet 9 February 2016 (item 14)	Constitutional Team 160 Tooley Street London SE1 2QH	Paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk
Web link: http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=302&MId=5144&Ver=4 (Item 14)		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Alasdair Smith, Director, Children and Families	
Report Author	Alasdair Smith, Director, Children and Families	
Version	Final	
<i>Dated</i>	29 June 2020	
<i>Key Decision?</i>	No	
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	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	29 June 2020	