

## Slough Borough Council

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	Cabinet
<b>DATE:</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> May 2024
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Children & Young People – Slough Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-27
<b>CHIEF OFFICER:</b>	Will Tuckley – Chief Executive
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Sue Butcher – Executive Director Children’s Services and Chief Executive Slough Children First
<b>WARD(S):</b>	All
<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	Councillor Puja Bedi – Lead Member Children’s Services
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	Yes
<b>EXEMPT:</b>	No
<b>DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN:</b>	Yes
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	Appendix 1 - Slough Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-27 Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1. Cabinet is asked to approve the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- 1.2. The Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines the three-year plan for corporate parenting responsibilities for children and young people. This sets out our vision for children and young people for whom the council has corporate parenting responsibilities for the period 2024-2027.
- 1.3. The strategy sets out priorities for children and young people cared for and outlines improvements to services and practice for children who are looked after or have care experience, so they are **Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving**.
- 1.4. Cabinet is referred to the Children and Young People’s Placement Sufficiency Strategy which was approved in December 2023 in which the six priorities for Corporate Parenting were identified.

#### Recommendations:

- 1.5. Cabinet is recommended to approve the Corporate Parenting Strategy set out in Appendix 1.

### 2. Commissioner Review:

*DLUHC Commissioner*

Commissioners have reviewed this report and have no specific comments to add.

## 2. Reason:

- 2.1. This report introduces the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027. The purpose of this report is to outline the Council's ambitions, priorities, and plans in respect of children looked after and care experienced young people (care leavers) for the next three years. This also outlines the corporate parenting responsibilities of Slough Borough Council and Slough Children First.
- 2.2. The Children and Young People's Placement Sufficiency Strategy ("the Placements Strategy") which was approved by Cabinet in 2023 outlines the six priorities for our approach to Corporate Parenting and sets out the intention to support our children and young people in relation to their home or placement needs.
- 2.3. At the time of writing the Council looks after 209 children in care and has responsibility for 176 care leavers or care experienced young people in Slough. These children and young people have a range of needs and experiences and live in a variety of homes (or placements) suited to their needs. As such the Strategy must outline priorities which meet the needs of all children looked after and care experienced young people and determine how these needs may be met over the next three years.
- 2.4. The Strategy demonstrates how partners across Slough will work together to ensure that we are meeting the needs of children looked after and care experienced young people. This also outlines how we will parent our children looked after as a whole council approach.

## 3. Introduction

- 3.1. Corporate parenting was defined within the Children Act 1989 guidance as, 'The responsibility of local authorities to improve outcomes and actively promote the life chances of children they look after is referred to as 'corporate parenting' in recognition that the task must be shared by the whole local authority in partnership with partner agencies along with parents. The role of the corporate parent is to act as the best parent for each child they look after and to act by speaking out on their behalf, arranging for appropriate services to meet their needs, standing up for them and representing them as needed, to ensure they grow up in the best possible way.
- 3.2. When a child comes into care, they become cared for, and Slough Borough Council and Slough Children First becomes their Corporate Parent. This means that everyone who works for SBC and SCF in any capacity, its elected Members, and its partners – in fact all those who play any part in making decisions for children in Slough – have a special and important responsibility in fulfilling the corporate parent role. Decision making shouldn't be assumed as only from Children's Services. Decision making should be from a wider council perspective that impacts on cared for children.
- 3.3. The Council's corporate parenting strategy includes key information such as the overarching vision and aims for the care and support of children in the authority's care, specific objectives, details of how the authority will meet the needs of children in care, plans for improving outcomes, provisions for education, health, and overall well-being, as well as measures for ensuring the involvement of children and young people in decision-making processes.
- 3.4. The strategy will be taken forward through **six strategic priority** areas:
  - **Priority area One:** Supporting engagement and achievement in education, training, and employment.
  - **Priority area Two:** Ensuring that our children looked after and care experienced young people have stable homes and the right help.

- **Priority area three:** We will listen and respond to the voice of our children, young people, and care experienced young people. They will help to develop and shape our strategic plans and delivery of services.
- **Priority area Four:** Ensuring that our children, young people, and care experienced young people are healthy. We will help our children and care experienced young people to have access to help for their physical needs and emotional wellbeing.
- **Priority area Five:** Developing a highly effective Care Leavers partnership to provide ongoing help in a variety of ways for them.
- **Priority Area Six:** Supporting children, young people and care experienced young people to have fun and have new experiences to develop their own interests.

3.5. The Corporate Parenting panel has agreed to identify a Member ‘Champion’ to work alongside Officers to support delivery against the priority areas. The success of the strategy will be measured against the 6 Promises – changed from ‘Pledges’ at the request of young people.

- Be Healthy
- Be Ambitious
- Be Resilient
- Be Happy
- Be Safe

#### 4. Options Considered

4.1. The following options were considered:

Option	Pros	Cons	Recommended
<b>1. Adopt the Corporate Parenting strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meets our statutory responsibilities/duty relating to corporate parenting.</li> <li>• Sets the Vision, aims and ambitions for SBC, SCF and our partners as corporate parents.</li> <li>• Provides strategic direction and clear expectations on all Departments about the importance of corporate parenting, roles, responsibilities, and duties.</li> <li>• Strategic planning to enable and facilitate the Corporate Parenting Panel to deliver their statutory functions.</li> <li>• Provides clarity of the key priorities to be achieved as corporate parents in the next three years.</li> <li>• Incorporates the finding from the LGA review and Ofsted inspection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outlines ambitious aims and objectives for SCB, SCF and partners to deliver in the next three-year period, requiring officer resource, dedication and setting priorities alongside other strategies and plans.</li> <li>• The Council, members and partner agencies will not understand their legal corporate parenting responsibilities.</li> </ul>	<b>Recommended</b>

	<p>recommendations relating to corporate parenting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a road map for how SBC and SCF will listen to, actively involves, respond to act on children and young people's wishes, feelings and lived experiences to ensure we are 'the best' corporate parent.</li> <li>• Provides strategic direction for our partner agencies in their role, responsibilities, and expectations as corporate parents.</li> <li>• Improvement in the life opportunities and outcomes for children cared for through the effective delivery of services, by SBC/SCF and partners agencies.</li> <li>• The Strategy promotes care experienced young people becoming a protected characteristic in practice through the delivery of our aims/objectives.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>2. Do not approve the Corporate Parenting Strategy</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business as usual approach - no additional officer resource required to deliver, implement, and embed strategy and deliver on associated action planning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SBC and SCF will risk not fulfilling their statutory obligations relating to corporate parenting.</li> <li>• There will be a lack of direction and strategic planning required for the Corporate Parenting Panel to deliver on their statutory functions.</li> <li>• There will be future inspection risk to SBC/SCF not progressing the recommendations made during the Ofsted Inspection and LGA review, as set out in the SCF business/improvement plan.</li> <li>• SBC/SCF require collaboration and partnership working with key partner agencies to deliver on their corporate parenting responsibilities; without a strategy in place, there is a risk partners may not engage or understand their duties/roles/responsibilities.</li> <li>• The LA (SCF/SBC) will need to revise the corporate parenting</li> </ul>	<p><b>Not recommended</b></p>

		<p>strategy and present this at a later building in delay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delayed opportunity to provide a strategic approach to active participation and involvement of children cared for.</li> <li>• Without a strategic approach and forward plan the development and delivery of services to improve the lives of children care for will be stand still, impacting their outcomes.</li> </ul>	
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## 5. Background

- 5.1. 'The responsibility of local authorities in improving outcomes and actively promoting the life chances of children they look after has become known as 'corporate parenting' in recognition that the task must be shared by the whole local authority and partner agencies. The role of the corporate parent is to act as the best possible parent for each child they look after and to advocate on his/her behalf to secure the best possible outcomes' (The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review, 2021).
- 5.2. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduces statutory corporate parenting principles, which comprise of seven needs that local authorities in England must have regard to whenever they exercise a function in relation to looked-after children or care leavers (collectively referred to as looked-after children and young people). These are not limited to functions sitting in Children's Services but relate to a wider range of functions. It is for the Council to consider the extent to which the corporate parenting principles are relevant to a particular service area or exercise of a particular function. This should be a reasonable and proportionate evaluation based on the extent to which the service/function is being carried out in relation to looked-after children and/or care leavers. The seven principles are:
- a. Act in the children and young people's best interests and promote their physical and mental health and wellbeing.*
  - b. Encourage the children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.*
  - c. Consider the children and young people's views, wishes and feelings.*
  - d. Help the children and young people to gain access to, and make best use of, services provided by the local authority and the organisations it works with.*
  - e. Have high aspirations for our children and young people and help them to achieve the best outcomes they can.*
  - f. Keep the children and young people safe and enable them to have stability in their home lives, relationships, education, and work.*
  - g. Prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.*
- 5.3. Whilst Slough Children First have the primary statutory responsibilities under the Children Act 1989 and associated legislation and regulations, the Council retain a strategic and legal responsibility for children looked after and care experienced young people. This includes duties in relation to housing and education to work together to improve outcomes for children looked after.
- 5.4. The statutory guidance on the corporate parenting principles emphasises the importance of strong leadership, challenge and accountability at every level. The quality of support can be measured in how the child or young person experiences the support they receive and

the extent to which they feel listened to and taken seriously. The Council reviewed its terms of reference for its Corporate Parenting Panel in 2023, following a review by the Local Government Association. The key responsibilities of the panel are as follows:

- Champion and provide clear strategic and political direction in relation to corporate parenting
- Support the development of a corporate parenting strategy and to monitor and review its implementation.
- Focus on improving outcomes for looked after children and care experienced young people.
- To consider recommendations from internal and external inspections and reviews.
- To hear the voice of looked after children and care experienced young people, including involving them in meetings.
- To monitor the education needs of care experienced children, promoting positive engagement of education partners in corporate parenting.
- To ensure the Council actively promotes opportunities for children looked after and care experienced young people across the whole Council
- To ensure that the voice and opinions of as wide a range of care experienced children and young people, including those with disabilities, are heard and that their views are used to co-produce services, shape policy and monitor performance.
- To advise the Lead Member for Children's Services, Cabinet and other relevant member bodies on issues relating to corporate parenting.
- To advise the Slough Children First board and other partners on issues relating to corporate parenting.
- To report annually to the Council on the work of the Panel.

5.5. The **Corporate Parenting Panel** has overseen the development of the strategy through workshops involving Members and Officers to support the vision for our children and young people. The strategy has been carefully considered using examples from other local authorities. The 'Promises', previously known as the Pledges, remain in place at the request of children and young people. The Corporate Parenting panel agreed to recommend the strategy to Cabinet on 4<sup>th</sup> April.

5.6. The Corporate Parenting Panel Annual report will be prepared for submission to Cabinet in September.

5.7. As corporate parents elected members and council officers have a statutory responsibility for the wellbeing of children in care. Elected members play a large part in holding officers and partners to account as well as being proactive in the corporate parenting role themselves, as Champions and Advocates. The Corporate Parenting Panel has decided to allocate an elected member champion to each strategic priority. These members will have no formal decision-making powers but will have a role in holding the executive to account and raising issues of concern at a directorate level.

### **Role of Slough Children First**

5.8. Slough Children First is responsible for exercising the Council's statutory children's social care services. Its officers are held to account by a company board and the Council as the sole owner of SCF, has a role in holding its to account. This is primarily undertaken via the contract management process and the new contractual performance indicators approved by Cabinet in December 2023 include the following relating specifically to services for looked after children:

- Effectiveness of corporate parenting panel
- Improved participation of children and young people at strategic level
- Participation in CLA reviews
- CLA placed over 20 miles away
- Care experienced young people in employment, education or training

## **Consultation with children and young people**

- 5.9. The Corporate Parenting Strategy has been developed with children and young people who are looked after by Slough or are care experienced. This has included direct feedback on a one-to-one basis and through their attendance at Corporate Parenting Panel.
- 5.10. Children and young people asked us to rename 'pledges' as promises which has been amended.
- 5.11. Children and young people advised us that we should explicitly talk more about finances beyond opening a bank account, and wanted more help to understand pensions, savings and spending advice.
- 5.12. Children and young people want more reassurance about the support they will receive when they are preparing to move into their first home and understanding if they need extra help. This has resulted in the Housing Transitions Strategic Group being formed to support this planning.
- 5.13. The six priorities were agreed with children and young people. They will remain members of the Corporate Parenting Panel, supported by the Participation Officer.

## **Local offer**

- 5.14. The Council has a statutory responsibility to publish its local offer to care leavers. This should include information about the services that are offered to asset care leavers in making a successful transition to independence. The Council can choose to extend this publication to include services offered by others. The statutory guidance sets out an expectation that the local offer is developed in partnership and dialogue between senior leaders and young people who are looked after and care leavers.
- 5.15. The Local Offer for Care Experienced young people is published on the Slough Children First website and sets out the range of support available to children and young people.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1. There are no additional financial implications arising from adopting the strategy itself. The strategy sets out priorities for children and young people cared for and outlines improvements to services and practice for children who are looked after or have care experience. In developing proposals to improve services and deliver the strategy consideration must be given to their affordability informing and being informed by the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and being contained within agreed financial limits.
- 6.2. The Corporate Parenting Strategy works alongside other strategies such as the sufficiency strategy to ensure best value for money and to support reducing costs where appropriate.

## **7. Legal implications**

- 7.1. The Council's children's social care services are under statutory intervention of the Department for Education and the Council has been directed that the majority of its statutory functions for children's social care must be exercised by Slough Children First. However, there remain overarching duties and responsibilities that are shared between the Council and SCF as they apply to a wider range of services.

- 7.2. Compliance with the corporate parenting principles in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 are one of those. In addition, the Council and SCF have a shared responsibility for compliance with s.2 of the 2017 Act, namely the responsibility to publish a local offer to care leavers, setting out the services and support available for care leavers.
- 7.3. The Council and SCF are collectively responsible for ensuring care leavers can access key services, including suitable housing, emotional wellbeing support and support to access education, training, and employment. For instance, SCF is responsible for ensuring the provision of personal advisor support to care leavers up to the age of 25, whereas the Council and SCF are collectively responsible for agreeing joint housing protocols to cover support to these individuals.
- 7.4. Statutory guidance published under the 2017 Act emphasises the importance of strong leadership, accountability and challenge at every level and the service areas where consideration of the corporate parenting principles are of most relevance: education, social care, housing, libraries, leisure and recreation, strategic policies (such as health and well-being plans) and local tax collection. With the exception of children's social care, these services are all provided by the Council. The corporate parenting principles do not apply to statutory partners, however there are cooperation duties for these partners and many of these agencies will have a key role to play in supporting looked after children and care leavers.

## **8. Risk management implications**

- 8.1. There are risks that the six priorities, as outlined in the strategy will not be achieved within the timeframes set. This will be mitigated by the Corporate Parenting Panel overseeing the delivery, implementation of the strategy and progress against the associated action plan.
- 8.2. The Chief Executive and Director Children's Services will work closely with the panel and Officers to ensure effective multi-agency working across the partnership to deliver the priorities for our children and young people.
- 8.3. In addition, a several of the objectives identified within the key priorities are priority areas within the Business and Improvement Plan and will therefore be reviewed as part of the Council and company contractual management.

## **9. Environmental implications**

- 9.1. None.

## **10. Equality implications**

- 10.1. The Council has a duty contained in section 149 of the Equality Act to have due regard to the need to:
  - a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 10.2. The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day-to-day business and to keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services. As a body delivering public functions, SCF is expected to comply with



this duty. In addition, July's full Council meeting voted for care experience to become a protected characteristic.

- 10.3. Strategically planning for our Corporate Parenting duties is critical to supporting both the Council and SCF to meet their equality duties, particularly in relation to advancing equality of opportunity by way of reducing inequalities that exist between certain groups of vulnerable children and their families and the wider population. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out our collective aims and ambitions for our care experienced young people under this duty.

An Equality Impact Assessment is appended at Appendix 2. This outlines the positive impact anticipated through the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. The EqlA identifies the need to capture more information in relation to children and young people who identify with the LGBTQIA+ community to ensure that appropriate services remain in place to support their needs. This will be developed further throughout the implementation.

## **11. Procurement implications**

- 11.1. There are no procurement implications from this proposal. However, it should be noted that strategic priority 5 focuses on improving our commissioning arrangements and relationships with the provider market to access better value homes for children in care and those who are care experienced.

## **12. Workforce implications**

- 12.1. None

## **13. Property implications**

- 13.1. None

## **14. Corporate Parenting impact**

- 14.1. Slough Borough Council and Slough Children First has a strategic and legal responsibility for children looked after and care experienced young people which is set out in legislation and national and local guidance. The Children Act 1989 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 placed a duty on Health, Housing, Education and Social Care as a minimum, to work together to improve outcomes for children looked after. The Children Act 2004 placed a statutory duty on Local Authorities to promote the educational achievement of children looked after.
- 14.2. The development and implementation of this Strategy involves SBC, SCF and several partner agencies across Slough, including health, police, housing, education, commissioning, performance, legal services, and finance. SCF staff commit to meeting with children cared for and our care experienced young people to offer their views about the strategy, to enable these to be built into the specific priority action plans and to crucially develop the 'Promises' children and young people want us to keep for the next three years. Thereafter, children and young people with care experience will be invited, through a variety of mechanisms (groups, consultation events/days, social media etc.) to hold us to account on the delivery of our priorities, through the Promises that we commit to.

## **15. Background Papers**

None