

Agenda Item	12.
Report No	CLH 22/19

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Care, Learning and Housing

Date: 14 March 2019

Report Title: **Corporate Parenting**

Report By: Interim Director of Care and Learning

1. **Purpose/Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the statutory responsibility of Corporate Parenting and activity in Highland, the setting up of the Community Planning Partnership Corporate Parenting Board and sustainability for the future.
- 1.2 This report also supports previous information shared in reports to Care, Learning and Housing Committee on 14 March and 30 May 2018 regarding Corporate Parenting Strategy.

2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the following:
 - i. Highland's Data around Looked After and Accommodated children and young people;
 - li Corporate Parenting Duties and responsibilities of Elected Members; and
 - ii. Ongoing work to engage with our Care Experienced Young People and their voices to shape how we support them.

3. Introduction

- 3.1 By accepting the challenge to champion all looked after and accommodated children and young people we are then committing to ensuring every child and young person in our care has the opportunity to achieve the outcomes we would want for our own children. As good corporate parents we will accept responsibility for them and make their needs a priority.
- 3.2 When a child has to enter the care of Highland Council for whatever reason, the tasks that would normally be the responsibility of their parents become the responsibility of everyone at the council, including officers, elected members, early learning and childcare centres, school, health and social care staff, and also our partner organisations. Effectively, we become corporate parents for those care experienced children and young people.

4. Duties and Responsibilities

- 4.1 Good corporate parenting requires ownership and leadership at the most senior level and this includes Elected Members. As corporate parents, it is the responsibility of all Elected Members to be satisfied that there is a joined up, effective and holistic approach to meeting the needs of children looked after and care experienced children and young people through policy and planning.
- 4.2 Councillors are in the unique and privileged position of being able to promote opportunities for looked after and accommodated children and young people through their political power, influence and through their connections to the community, and key partner agencies and organisations. It is Elected Members duties to ensure that they are prioritised in decision making and this can be achieved by ensuring that in whatever capacity you attend meetings and committees of the council that you challenge and question the decisions, whether key or non-key, that are made that can affect the outcomes of our children looked after.
- 4.3 In ensuring that all children looked after by the local authority interests are protected, their opportunities maximised, their educational achievement enhanced, their voices heard and have services shaped to meet their needs is critical to better outcomes for all care experienced children and young people.
- 4.4 Councillors and members of the Corporate Parenting Board have a specific role in ensuring that corporate parenting responsibilities to looked after and accommodated children and young people are being fulfilled.

5. Background and Legislation

- 5.1 Whilst Councils have always had a statutory duty for children in care (Looked After), this was strengthened with the implementation of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which named 24 public bodies as Corporate Parents. The definition in the associated statutory guidance is given as “An organisation’s performance of actions necessary to uphold the rights and safeguard the wellbeing of a looked after child or care leaver, and through which physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development is promoted.” This applies up to the age of 26 years.

It is important that we report to Members regularly where and how we are achieving caring for children and young people. The following snapshot was taken from a report on the 31 January 2019:

- Highland currently has 508 children and young people looked after and accommodated;
- 354 children and young people are accommodated in kinship care, foster care or residential care including secure care;
- 74% are in family based placements including foster carers or kinship carers;
- 154 children and young people are looked after at home with a statutory order secured through Scottish Children's Reporter Administration.

5.2 Highland Council and its Community Planning Partners has recognised the importance of Corporate Parenting and Engagement with its Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) and has started putting the following in place to ensure the sustainability of communication and improvements in the longer term.

One of the *For Highland's Children* Improvement Groups for children's services is designated for Looked After Children, and is chaired by the Head of Children's Services. There is an improvement plan and the meetings are well supported, with the plan being active and wide-ranging. This plan now also incorporates several actions which were identified through a Council Redesign review of these services. This highlighted the need to work across established professional groupings, as education emerged as a high priority along with continued development of placement resources and a renewed emphasis on foster care.

Highland had in place a CHAMPS Board (Children have Amazing Minds, Potential and Stories) where some care experienced young people and senior professionals meet together to develop relationships and understanding and discuss challenges in the Highland area and develop new initiatives. Most of the improvements from CHAMPS have been based around the Care Leavers Covenant.

5.3 Highland Council has taken the view that there is a need for enhanced strategic leadership of corporate parenting across community planning partners, in order to:

- Oversee the development and implementation of the Corporate Parenting Plan(s) of the various agencies;
- Ensure that those Plans are informed by the CHAMPS, and active engagement with CEYP in a range of ways, underpinned by a Participation Strategy for Highland's CEYP;
- Support the implementation of the Care Leavers Covenant which was endorsed by the Community Planning Partnership.

It was also agreed that a Community Planning Partnership Corporate Parenting Board and Steering Group were set up to take forward the Corporate Parenting Agenda.

6. CHAMPS (Children have amazing minds, potential and stories)

6.1 It is important to celebrate that care experienced children and young people have important information to share and be heard and they feel safe and not judged for doing so. Clachnaharry is a safe space developed by care experienced young people for care experienced young people. Relationships are important and all care experienced children and young people tell us when they participate they feel comfortable, secure, supported and listened to.

6.2 Our CHAMPS activity is funded by a grant from the Life Changes Trust, (a Trust set up to improve the life chances for Care Experienced Young People age 14 plus). Our initial grant was for 3 years and we have just received confirmation that we have

secured further funding for a further 2 years. This funding is match funded by Highland Council both in kind and cash. This has been crucial in the development of this part of the service. Through this funding we have a coordinator employed by Who Cares? Scotland (Campaigning and advocacy service for CEYP) who coordinate the CHAMPS activity across Highland in partnership with Highland Council and High Life Highland.

- 6.3 We have CHAMPS groups running at Clachnaharry for older care experienced young people and children which includes Little CHAMPS with the youngest being 5 years old. There is a CHAMPS running in Dingwall Academy and it has CEYP from all care backgrounds. The group was initially supported by the CHAMPS Coordinator with the offer of High Life Highland maintaining it to ensure its sustainability. This offer is still available but Dingwall Academy CHAMPS have decided to maintain it within the school with dedicated teaching staff and this is proving successful with the whole school having a better understanding of children and young people who are looked after and accommodated within their school community.
- 6.4 We are working in partnership with schools across Highland to set up more CHAMPS groups. This is part of the plan to sustain activity once our funding has ceased. Groups will be school and community based and run by existing colleagues in local communities such as school, social work and Highlife Highland staff. Both the CHAMPS Coordinator and Highland Council support the groups until they can continue on their own.
- 6.5 These groups allow care experienced young people to come together in a safe environment for both social and support. Each session included food, social activities and talks or strengths and pressures identification. The most important part of these groups is the relationship building with each other and the adults who attend. Strengths and pressures raised by the young people at the appropriate forum with individual workers. We have an open and honest relationship with the young people and are clear what we can and can't do with the information shared. There are also lots of ideas for opportunities to be developed and the CHAMPS take these to the Steering Group to develop these.
- 6.6 They will also be supported to take proposals to the Corporate Parenting Board. We have approached young people, professionals and Managers in Caithness and CHAMPS will be set up there shortly in either a community or school buildings. These groups will be set up initially by the CHAMPS Coordinator and a High Life Highland Youth Worker. Once groups are running well we will leave the groups with either HLH and/or the school, this will ensure their sustainability.
- 6.7 Plans are in place to do similar in Lochaber, Isle of Skye and Inverness Schools. All CHAMPS will report into the Steering Group and/or the Corporate Parenting Board. We are also looking at how to reach remote care experienced young people and young people in Out of authority placements and are in discussions about setting up IT solutions for them to join in with CHAMPS.
- 6.8 Our Plan is to ensure CHAMPS groups are set up and running independently in local areas across Highland and that these groups feed in strengths, concerns, improvements and ideas to the Steering Group and Corporate Parenting Board. These groups will also attend these meetings to advise and guide corporate parents.
- 6.9 The CHAMPS are also involved in National Events and Campaigning across Scotland. For National Care Day on the 15 February 2019 Highland CHAMPS will be joining Moray CHAMPS for a discussion with Maree Todd MSP. They will also be working with the Steering Group and Corporate Parenting Board to plan and deliver some

events to raise the profile of CEYP across Highland.

- 6.10 Last year they arranged a PROM, Journeys in the North Exhibition, Corporate Parenting Market Place and a civic reception at the Town Hall Celebrating Success. The CHAMPS have written their own songs and a CD produced with Moniach Mhor, they have also been involved in poetry, stories and graphic design. Feis Ross has provided a music group at Clachnaharry and a new music group is starting at Eden Court supported by Feis Ross and Eden Court which has proved successful and highlighted the talents of our care experienced children and young people.
- 6.11 The CHAMPS have also worked on further bids for funding from the Life Changes Trust and to develop the gardens at Clachnaharry. The bid for the Life Changes Trust Home & Belonging funding was to ensure CEYP can live independently in the own homes and be an active member in their community. This bid was developed in partnership with the Calman Trust to create a part of an app to help CEYP access solutions to living independently and this was linked to groups and training opportunities at Clachnaharry for identified independence skills and housing support. It also included volunteering and mentoring. This bid was successful and will provide 3 years funding to make a real impact on independence. We are still waiting to hear about the gardening bid and our neighbours at Clachnaharry are keen to assist the CHAMPS with the gardens if we are successful.

7. Steering Group and Corporate Parenting Board

7.1 Steering Group

- 7.1.1 A steering group has been set up which includes corporate parents from statutory and non-statutory services across Highland. This group is to ensure changes are implemented on the ground and to assist young people to request, plan and implement improvements. They also identify and develop opportunities for CEYP.
- 7.1.2 The steering group has identified lots of opportunities across Highland for Care Experienced young people but our biggest issue is getting the information to all care experienced young people so they are aware of the opportunities available to them. One possibility is identifying ambassadors across services that have contact with CEYP where opportunities can be promoted to colleagues and the information reach CEYP. This idea will be discussed with the newly formed Corporate Parenting Board.

7.2 Corporate Parenting Board

- 7.2.1 The Corporate Parenting Board has been set up and will meet on Wednesday 13 February 2019. It will be chaired by Cllr Linda Munro and has membership from Elected Members, Senior officers across the Community Planning Partnership and Care experienced young people.
- 7.2.2 The first meeting will take place in Clachnaharry giving Members the opportunity to meet some CHAMPS.
- Purpose:
- To promote the corporate parenting role of statutory agencies and to promote awareness of the duties towards care experienced young people in the Highland area.
 - To consider matters brought forward by the CHAMPS and assist with the related action plan.
 - To take forward the Care Leavers' Covenant and support the Corporate Parenting plans of statutory agencies.

- To develop relationships with our care experienced young people and provide opportunities for them to improve their life outcomes.

7.2.3 The corporate parenting board is keen to do its business very differently. It recognises that meeting and discussing around a table is not the best way to achieve change. It also recognises that information will come to them in different ways from their young people. They are keen to look at different ways of developing relationships with their young people and that relationships, listening and hearing their young people's perspective on their lives and issues is a positive way forward.

7.2.4 Action Plan:

- Maintain CEYP CHAMPS Group and enable transition to HLH coordinating and supporting it and CEYP managing it.
- To recruit other young people to the CHAMPS group from different care backgrounds.
- Maintain CEYP CHAMPS in Dingwall Academy and provide coordination, advice and support to School and CEYP to run it and feed into CEYP Leadership Group and Local Forums for change
- Set up as many CHAMPS groups as requested and once running enable transition to appropriate community/school resource to maintain group and feed into CEYP Group and Local Forums for change
- Provide opportunities for CEYP to be involved in areas about their lives and improvement/development of services.
- Ensure contribution of CEYP in training and awareness raising opportunities. #Love
- Ensure CEYP have opportunities to attend forums across Scotland and contribute to the national perspective and identity.
- Continue to investigate and implement IT solutions for remote and out of authority CEYP.
- Work over the next two years and beyond to ensure sustainability of engagement with CEYP, Corporate Parents and find opportunities for them to meet and build relationships.

8. Implications

8.1 Resource

This does not directly result in any new resource implications. Services are provided within existing budgets, and there is a major programme for new activity for care experienced CHAMPS development which is funded by Life Changes Trust.

8.2 Legal

CHAMPS, Steering Group and the Corporate Parenting Board provide a strategic vehicle to deliver on statutory duties towards care experienced young people.

8.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)

Care experienced young people are likely to have experienced significant challenges in childhood and early adulthood. The Plan seeks to ensure that they are given support and the opportunity to raise issues.

8.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever

No implications were identified

8.5 Risk

No new risks were identified.

8.6 Gaelic

It should be noted that Bòrd na Gàidhlig has its own Corporate Parenting responsibilities and provide opportunities for CEYP

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