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**By:** Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services  
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**To:** Cabinet – 5 December 2011

**Subject:** **KENT'S MULTI-AGENCY LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STRATEGY**

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary:** This report presents the draft Looked After Children Strategy.

**Recommendations:** Cabinet is asked to ENDORSE the Multi- agency Looked After Children Strategy.

## Introduction

1. (1) Kent County Council's improvement notice includes a requirement to put in place a detailed Looked After Children Strategy that sets out how the authority and its partner agencies will promote better outcomes for its looked after children and care leavers.

(2) The strategy has been influenced by feedback and contributions from all key agencies and services - schools and further education colleges, health services, Connexions, Catch 22, Young Lives Foundation and through the following boards; all of whom have endorsed the strategy:

- Kent's Corporate Parenting Group – May 2011 and July 2011
- Kent's Safeguarding Children's Board – May 2011
- The Corporate Parenting Panel – July 2011

(3) A commitment to support the implementation of the Looked After Children Strategy will be sought from the Kent Association of Headteachers.

(4) The strategy also includes contributions by children and young people through Kent's Children in Care Council. These are outlined in the strategy.

(5) The strategy contains 2 annexes that underpin the strategy:

- Annex A sets out the roles and responsibilities of professionals/staff involved in delivering corporate parenting. This was a specific issue highlighted by Ofsted as needing to be part of a looked after children strategy.

- Annex B outlines Kent's pledge to looked after children and care leavers.

(5) The strategy is also underpinned by the Looked After Children Work Plan; setting out the actions that are being undertaken with respect to looked after children and care leavers to achieve Kent's improvement plan, and by the placement strategy (under development), which is a 3 year strategy seeking to reduce looked after children numbers and overall expenditure on looked after children by the end of March 2015.

### **Financial Implications**

2. The strategy is underpinned by Kent County Council's Specialist Children's Services' placement strategy, which seeks to reduce numbers and expenditure required to support looked after children, whilst also delivering better outcomes.

### **Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework**

3. The strategy supports Bold Steps, especially focusing on tackling disadvantage and supporting independence through improving outcomes and reducing numbers of looked after children.

### **Legal Implications**

4. None envisaged. The strategy encourages improved practice which is in line with existing legislation whilst encouraging a reduction in bureaucracy that can get in the way of promoting better outcomes for looked after children / care leavers.

### **Equality Impact Assessments**

5. An equality impact assessment has been undertaken and no specific issues were identified from this assessment that required further attention in the strategy.

### **Implementation Proposals**

6. (1) Each agency involved in delivering corporate parenting for looked after children and care leavers will be required to develop an operational plan setting out how they will contribute to delivering the looked after children strategy.

(2) These plans will be presented to the Kent Corporate Parenting Group and Corporate Parenting Panel for endorsement and review.

(3) An annual report from Kent Corporate Parenting Group, setting out progress in delivering the strategy, is to be presented to senior management groups/boards and member boards.

(4) The placement strategy will be a key driver in delivering the changes in practice and performance that are reflected in the objectives of the multi-agency Looked After Children Strategy. Members of Kent Corporate Parenting Group will be asked to secure support from their agencies/services to ensure that the objectives set out in the placement strategy are achieved. In this respect the placement strategy is seen as being something that is in the interests of all agencies involved in delivering corporate parenting; as well as promoting better outcomes for children and young people through strengthening their sense of permanency and belonging.

(5) Officers are in the process of developing Area/District based operational plans that will support the implementation of the strategy.

### **Risk and Business Continuity Management**

7. The need for a multi-agency strategy was identified by Ofsted and is included in the requirements outlined by the Secretary of State in the improvement notice to Kent County Council.

### **Consultation and Communication**

8. (1) The strategy has been consulted on widely - see Section 1 (2) of this report – including seeking the views of carers, professionals, elected members (via the Corporate Parenting Board) and children / young people.

(2) An executive summary of the strategy is to be produced. A summary of the strategy for children and young people will also be developed in liaison with Kent's Children in Care Council.

### **Sustainability and Rural Proofing Implications**

9. The planned reduction in numbers of looked after children through the placement strategy includes measures to ensure that reductions made will be sustainable in the longer term, therefore maintaining effective services but at a lower cost (ie more for less).

### **Are there any Personnel or Health and Safety Issues which are relevant?**

10. None envisaged.

### **Alternatives and Options**

11. None. A multi-agency looked after children strategy is a requirement from the Secretary of State.

### **Conclusions**

12. (1) The Looked After Children Strategy seeks to improve outcomes for looked after children / care leavers through enabling all key agencies to work together under shared goals and objectives in order to deliver good and effective corporate parenting.

(2) In addition to being a specific requirement from the Secretary of State, the implementation of the strategy will also enable opportunities to reduce the numbers of children and young people needing to be looked after.

**Recommendations:**

13. Cabinet is asked to ENDORSE the multi-agency Looked After Children Strategy.

*Background Documents:*

None

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