

DECISION-MAKER:	CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL
SUBJECT:	SERVICE RESPONSE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN REPORT ON THE EXPERIENCES OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN
DATE OF DECISION:	25 MARCH 2021
REPORT OF:	EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHILDREN AND LEARNING

<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
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STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY	
Not applicable	
BRIEF SUMMARY	
<p>In December 2020, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) published the report, 'Careless: Helping to Improve Council Services to Children in Care'. The report, attached as Appendix 1, considers learning from complaints that the LGSCO has investigated on behalf of looked after children.</p> <p>The report outlined a number of areas that local authority scrutiny panels should explore with Children Services Departments. To aid this process, attached as Appendix 2, is a position statement developed by the service against the identified key lines of enquiry.</p>	
RECOMMENDATIONS:	
(i)	That the Panel note and challenge the current service performance outlined in Appendix 2 and consider the opportunities identified for future scrutiny.
REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS	
1.	<p>Southampton City Council has corporate parenting responsibility for looked after children in its care and care leavers. Corporate Parenting Principles have been set out by the Department for Education (2018) and are defined as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people • to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
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ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

2. None

DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)

3.	In the introduction to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) report, 'Careless: Helping to Improve Council Services to Children in Care', it is reported that in the last five years the LGSCO have received more than 150 complaints and enquiries a year in which they identified problems about services to children in care as the key issue. The LGSCO have regularly upheld more than two thirds of complaints they go on to investigate in detail.
4.	The LGSCO is keen to share learning from complaints with locally elected councillors who have the democratic right to scrutinise the way councils carry out their functions and hold them to account. This is particularly important for looked after children where the council is their corporate parent.
5.	Analysis of the complaints by the Ombudsman has highlighted key questions elected members could ask officers when scrutinising services for looked after children.
6.	In response to the suggested questions, a Position Statement, attached as Appendix 2, has been developed by Children's Services. The appended document outlines the current service position against the LGSCO areas of focus.
7.	Based on the service analysis three broad opportunities for further scrutiny of the issues raised have been identified: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There could be a thematic discussion regarding placement sufficiency; this could also include the use of unregulated placements and in addition cover the outstanding fostering discussion noted in the monitoring appendix. • The annual IRO annual report could be presented to Scrutiny Panel when it is completed in Autumn 2021. • There could be a focus on the mental health of looked after children, jointly with health colleagues.
8.	The Panel are recommended to consider the attached LGSCO report and scrutinise the services response outlined in the Position Statement, and the suggestions for developing awareness and insight into the issues.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital/Revenue

9.	None at this stage
<u>Property/Other</u>	
10.	None at this stage
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:</u>	
11.	S.111 Local Government Act 1972
<u>Other Legal Implications:</u>	
12.	None
RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS	
13.	The principal risk is that looked after children and care leavers would be disadvantaged if a local authority was failing to discharge its corporate parenting duties effectively. The risk is mitigated through the local authority quality assurance process and governance via the Corporate Parenting Committee.
POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS	
14.	The Corporate Plan 2020 sets out the following regarding the wellbeing of children in the city: <p>“Working with partners to deliver the ambitions set out in the five-year Health and Wellbeing Strategy, this area looks at wellbeing across the city, with a focus on adults and children’s social care, education and public health. We work closely with partners to help safeguard vulnerable people across the city. We are focused on delivering strong customer experience across the Adults and Children & Families services. We want Southampton to be a city that is recognised for its proactive approach to preventing problems and intervening early, as well being a ‘Child Friendly City’ where children and young people have great opportunities and an aspiration to achieve. We want our residents to have the information and support they need to lead safe, active, healthy lives and to be able to live independently for longer.”</p>

KEY DECISION?	No
WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	All
<u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u>	
Appendices	
1.	Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman report – Careless: Helping to Improve Council Services to Children in Care
2.	Position Statement

Documents in Members’ Rooms

1.	None
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Equality Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality and Safety Impact Assessment (ESIA) to be carried out?	No
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Data Protection Impact Assessment		
Do the implications/subject of the report require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to be carried out?		No
Other Background Documents		
Other Background documents available for inspection at:		
Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)	
1.	None	