

REPORT OF THE VULNERABLE CHILDREN'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

CORPORATE PARENTING

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Corporate parenting is the term used to describe the responsibilities of a Local Authority in respect of the children in its care. The Vulnerable Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee have been examining how the Council, Council Partners, Staff and Elected Members can improve our commitment to Corporate Parenting.
- 1.2 The Leader of the Council is the ultimate Corporate Parent to children in care and has a duty to ensure that the allocation of resources is adequate to meet the needs of looked after children and young people. However all Elected Members share responsibility for looked after children and should therefore:
- Ensure that there is the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are looked after;
 - Ensure that the Council performs well in respect of looked after children and young people;
 - Champion the rights of looked after children and young people directly and through our other roles; and
 - Act in the way we would if the child or young person was our own, promoting life chances and making opportunities available.
- 1.3 The intention of this paper is to raise the profile of Corporate Parenting and to highlight some of the actions that the Council is already taking to ensure that systems and processes are in place to adequately support elected Members to undertake this role.
- 1.4 **The numbers of children and young people in care** over the past few years has declined slightly, however at any point there remain around 1900 children and young people in the care of the City Council. In total over 2500 children were looked after by the Local Authority at some point in the last year. A snapshot of the children in care population in June 2011 showed that of the 1896 children in care:
- 946 were aged between 0-10 years and 950 were aged between 11-18 years;
 - There were slightly more boys than girls in care;
 - 219 children were placed in residential care, 1322 children were placed in foster care, 70 children were placed for adoption, 184 children were living with connected carers for example family or friends, 8 children were in custody; and
 - 233 children were placed more than 20 miles outside the city.
- 1.5 **The Council also has the responsibility to support Care Leavers**, of which there are approximately 800 at any one time. These young people range from the age of 16 years through to either 21 or 25, for young people remaining in education and/or with disabilities. The Local Authority should ensure that care

leavers are given the same level of care and support that their peers would receive from a reasonable parent and that they are provided with the opportunities to help them move successfully into adulthood. On average 200 young people leave care in Birmingham in any one year.

2. IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- 2.1 Children and young people in care have the right to expect the same outcomes that we would want for every child. However, the past circumstances and experiences of children and young people in care mean that they are often disadvantaged from the outset. As a result, many have experienced poorer outcomes than their peers across a range of measures including health and education.
- 2.2 Committee Members were privileged to be invited to the elections of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) which took place in the Council Chamber on the 27th October 2011. The CiCC has a membership of fifteen children and young people who have experience of growing up in care in Birmingham. The CiCC's aim is to improve the experiences and life chances of children and young people by letting those in charge know what life in care is really like for them.
- 2.3 Until recently there were two Corporate Parenting Boards within Birmingham City Council, a strategic board and an operational board. Over the last few years, these two bodies have ensured, amongst other things that all children in care have free passports to leisure facilities in the City and have produced a number of policies and guidance documents. Most notably, in 2010, taking into consideration the views and experiences of children and young people in care, the Council made a pledge to children in care (attached) which made a number of commitments to children and young people living in care in Birmingham.
- 2.4 There is now one Corporate Parenting Board which is made up of: Elected Members; the Director of Children, Young People and Families; representatives from other Directorates; the CiCC; Health; Police; Rights of a Child; Children's Social Care and Human Resources. The Board works to champion the rights of looked after children and ensure improvements in the outcomes for them.
- 2.5 The current Ofsted inspection regime has a particular focus on services and outcomes for looked after children, alongside the inspection of safeguarding. This includes assessing the effectiveness of the Corporate Parenting approach. A number of opportunities to strengthen Corporate Parenting have been identified by the newly incorporated Corporate Parenting Board to encourage improvements in this area of work. This report provides a summary of some of the key measures that the Board has been considering which are fully supported by Committee Members.

3. PROVIDING THE BEST ENVIRONMENT TO THRIVE

- 3.1 Research shows that children do their best when they are living in families. When they cannot live with their own families then an alternative family is the best option. To achieve this, the Corporate Parenting Board has identified that children's placements need to be supported by:
 - Improved City Council advertising for foster and adoptive carers;

- The provision of resources to support the recruitment, training and approval of foster and adoptive carers. This should include improvements to the Adoption website;
- The relaxation of Birmingham City Council corporate procurement requirements and procedures in children's homes, for example the maintenance and the purchase of food, to maximise the resources to enhance children's lives;
- The provision of homes so that children can return to live with their own family or with foster or adoptive carers;
- The provision of financial and professional support and expertise to extend foster or adoptive carers' homes to enable brothers and sisters to live together or increase the number of children that a carer can accommodate; and
- A 'significant adult' is identified in the lives of each Care Leaver to help guide them through their transition to adulthood.

4. ENCOURAGING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

4.1 Educational achievement is a very significant factor in improving the life chances of children and young people living in care. Councillor Anne Underwood, on behalf of the Committee has contributed to the School Governor Forum, asking that Governors receive regular updates on the performance of the children in care at their schools and that this is a standing item on meeting agendas. It has also been agreed that there should be a Governor who champions the rights of children in care, at each school.

4.2 It is the responsibility of elected Members to ensure that they:

- Take every opportunity to listen to the young people in our care and act as 'pushy parents', using their influence to overcome barriers that young people may face in their education; and
- Encourage the Lord Mayors Charity to include a donation each year to the City's looked after children to provide learning opportunities for them.

5. ENCOURAGING INDIVIDUAL TALENTS AND INTERESTS

5.1 There is a wealth of talent, skills and experience amongst Birmingham City Council Members, staff and partner agencies. Employees could create a huge pool of opportunities for children in care. If a child demonstrates a particular interest, talent or chosen career path it is likely that someone within the Council may be able to offer them encouragement and help to develop this skill/passion and share their expertise with them.

5.2 Encouraging positive activities has the potential to improve the lives of all children. To achieve this objective the Corporate Parenting Board have identified that it would be helpful if:

- Someone in the Council is identified to encourage and develop this type of initiative, putting children and young people in care in touch with employees who can show an ongoing interest in their lives; and
- Resources are made available to purchase special equipment, clothing or materials to enable children and young people in care to develop their interests and participate on an equal footing with other children.

6. SUPPORTING ACCESS TO WORK

6.1 When a child or young person is in the care of the local authority, the Council should be seeking to provide the same opportunities that a family would provide to that child. To a young person in care, the Council is the 'family business'. As the 'family business', the Council should make the following opportunities available for young people in care and care leavers:

- Work experience opportunities in preparation for higher or further education and future career choices/opportunities. Council partners should be expected to do the same;
- Priority places on apprenticeship schemes;
- Priority in securing employment with Birmingham City Council and its partners. Subject to the minimum criteria being met for the person specification, all Council care leavers should be guaranteed an interview for advertised posts within the Council for the first five years after leaving care; and
- Mentoring from Birmingham City Council employees and Members to help prepare/equip them for the world of work, higher or further education or just to take an ongoing interest in them.

7. LISTENING TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

7.1 Members' visits to children's residential homes provide a good opportunity to listen to the views of children and young people living in care. Work has been undertaken to revise the paperwork that will support you in making the most of your visits. The new paperwork is attached. It is recommended that some visits to children's establishments are announced so that young people can ensure that they are free at that time and, therefore, have an opportunity to speak to you.

7.2 Councillors should make the most of opportunities to meet with social workers on visits and should ask about the support for children and young people living in care.

7.3 A 'councillor champion' should be identified for looked-after children in each constituency to help co-ordinate visits to children's establishments, feedback any issues and support fellow Members in the Corporate Parenting role.

7.4 Councillors should be regularly sent briefing emails and letters detailing children's achievements and celebration events. Councillors should be involved in events that are celebrating the achievements of children in their constituency.

7.5 Each year the Vulnerable Children's O&S Committee should invite representatives of the Children In Care Council to meet Members of the Committee to share their views.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 When the former Secretary of State Frank Dobson MP, launched the Quality Protects Programme in 1998 he sent a letter to all Councillors which said that:

Elected Councillors have a crucial role. Only you can carry it out. You can make sure that the interests of children come first. You bring a fresh look and common sense. As councillors you set the strategic direction of your council's services and determine policy and priorities for your local community within the overall objectives set by Government.'

- 8.2 We all have responsibility for the welfare and safety of children and young people in Birmingham. If you are interested in taking a greater Corporate Parenting role by, for example, taking the lead for looked after children in your constituency or by providing work experience or mentoring opportunities for a child or young person in care, then please fill out the attached form. Alternatively, you may prefer to contact Margaret Mackechnie, Interim Assistant Director Children in Care, Margaret.mackechnie@birmingham.gov.uk to discuss.

MOTION

That the City Council recognises the important role of the Corporate Parenting Board and calls on all Members to be pro-active in undertaking their individual and collective Corporate Parenting responsibilities.



Birmingham's Corporate Parenting Pledge

to Children and Young People in Care



We promise..

1. *To involve you in decisions that affect you and to listen to your views.*
2. *That we will endeavour to find you the best possible place for you to live.*
3. *To make sure that you have every opportunity possible to achieve your best at school.*
4. *To encourage you to take part in all available activities that the city has to offer to ensure that your talents, hobbies and interests are met and to support you to do the things you enjoy.*
5. *To take care of your health and encourage you to be healthy.*
6. *To provide you with a good and clear assessment of your needs and an up to date care plan.*
7. *That you will have your own social worker who visits you regularly and gives you details about how to contact them or someone else if they are away when you need them.*
8. *We will help you stay in touch with your family, friends and other people who are important to you.*
9. *We will listen to what you have to say.*
10. *To work with you and give you all the help and support you need to successfully move from care to adult life.*

Councillor Mike Whitby

Leader,
Birmingham City Council

Stephen Hughes

Chief Executive,
Birmingham City Council

Tony Howell

Director of Children's Services,
Birmingham City Council

Kevin McGee

Chief Executive, Heart of Birmingham
PCT on behalf of Health

Councillor Les Lawrence

Cabinet Member, Children, Young People and
Families, on behalf of the Children's Trust partners

Councillor Barbara Wood

Chair of the Corporate
Parenting Board

Councillor Catharine Grundy

Shadow Cabinet Member,
Children's Services

For further information or for a copy of the pledge, contact Children's Rights and Engagement Service on
Tel: 0121 303 7217, Freephone: 0800 052 4900 or email: childrensrightsadmin@birmingham.gov.uk

**Children, Young People and Families Directorate –
Councillor Visit (Reg 33) to a Children's Home.**

Name of Home.	Date & Time of Visit.	
1. Comments from Young people.		
2. Comments on observations of the homes environment.		
	Rating 0, 3, 5	
3. Comments on care to young people and interaction with staff.		
4. Comments on current education placements for young people.		
5. Comments on community and neighbourhoods.		
	Rating 0, 3, 5	
6. Any additional Comments:		
Name of Councillor:	Date & Signed:	
Please email the completed report to the Children's Commissioning Team – childrens.commissioning@birmingham.gov.uk		
Rating. 0 = Unsatisfactory 3 = Satisfactory 5 = Good		

Guidance Notes

General The purpose of the visit to a Children's Home is to: - o Provide a sense of what is like to live in a Children's Home. - o Explore the conduct of the home rather than its implementation of policy and procedure, guidance and regulations. - o Explore the culture and atmosphere of the home, - o Seek young peoples experience of living in the home, - o Explore how the home is managed and staff approach to young people. - o Make a judgement on how well the home is meeting the needs of the young people living there. Councillors: - o Are not expected to have special skills to enable them to recognise abusers. - o Should hold no allegiance to adults who work in the home and focus of the visit is on the quality of care. - o Are free to ask naïve questions and explore the way the home is run.
1. Comments from Young people. Is there evidence (directly from Young People) to support that - o Young people know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care including any reviews. - o The wishes feelings and view of young people are taken into account in developing the home and the recruitment process. - o A wide range of activities both inside and outside of the home is available. The discussion with the young person should be around what it is like living at the home, how their views are taken into account in planning their care and the running of the home. Discussions should not be about why they needed to come into care and their personal circumstances.
2. Comments on observations of the homes environment. Is the home (including bedrooms) is homely, welcoming and in good state or repair (e.g. flowers, plants, pictures / photographs and ornaments)? Can young people personalise their own space, have a safe place for personal possessions and have a key to their bedroom?
3. Comments on care to young people and interaction with staff. Do young people living in the home feel safe and are safe? Are staff able to protect individuals from abuse and other forms of significant harm (i.e. Bullying)? Is there evidence of positive relationships between staff and young people which generates a culture of openness and trust? Are staff aware and feel confident to implement the 'Whistle Blowing' Policy?
4. Comments on current education placements for young people. Are there suitable arrangements made for the full time education, training, or employment of all young people who live in the home?
5. Comments on community and neighbourhoods. Are there positive links made within the local community and with neighbours to ensure community cohesion and understanding of the purpose of the home?
6. Please Note Any additional Comments.

The Councillor visiting the home must contact the home's Service Manager – (Residential) immediately after the visit if there are safeguarding shortfalls or any significant number of concerns.

Acknowledgment is given to Kirklees Council. This template is adapted from their format.



Corporate Parenting Interest Form

Name.....

Contact details

Telephone.....

Email.....

Address.....

Ward.....

Constituency.....

I am interested in (Please Tick)

☐

Co-ordinating work in my constituency (Please provide details)

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.....

☐

Providing work experience opportunities (Please provide details)

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.....

☐

Providing mentoring opportunities (Please provide details)

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☐

Other (Please provide details)

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Please place this form in the box in the Names Room at the Council meeting on the 1st November, or alternatively send to **Margaret Mackechnie, Interim Assistant Director for Children in Care** at:

Council House Extension
Margaret Street
Birmingham
B3 3BU