



Report of the Director of Children's Services

Executive Board

Date: 5 July 2006

Subject: Improving Corporate Parenting in Leeds

Electoral Wards Affected: All

Specific Implications For:
Ethnic minorities <input type="checkbox"/>
Women <input type="checkbox"/>
Disabled people <input type="checkbox"/>
Narrowing the Gap <input type="checkbox"/>

Eligible for Call in

Not Eligible for Call In
(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines proposals for Leeds City Council's arrangements to fulfill its responsibility as the Corporate Parent of all Looked After Children in Leeds. It proposes that the Council develops a Corporate Parenting Guarantee and a Corporate Parenting Framework. Corporate Parenting will be led by elected members, senior Council officers and all departmental staff, working towards a good parenting entitlement for each Looked After Child.

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to establish a framework for Corporate Parenting which includes a Looked After Children's "guarantee".

The report also outlines a review/monitoring process to ensure that progress is made against clear targets.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Children Act 2004 and the "Every Child Matters" agenda have given particular focus to Looked After Children as a group where outcomes need to be improved. In that regard, it has also brought into focus the role of Corporate Parenting within a Council, particularly with regard to the recent requirement on raising educational achievement for our Looked After Children.

2.2 In 2005, as part of the progress towards implementing "Every Child Matters" in Leeds, a cross-party/officer working group was set up to develop a framework which could be

established in Leeds. Children and young people were consulted through Leeds Children's Rights, who have a contractual arrangement with social services to provide a range of services for our Looked After Children and young people. The working group acknowledged that although there are some established processes in place, they do not meet the expectations set out in the Children Act 2004.

The newly established OfSTED / CSCI inspection teams will be looking for demonstrable evidence of Corporate Parenting across the council and health services.

3.0 WHAT IS CORPORATE PARENTING?

3.1 Corporate Parenting is a responsibility outlined in the Children Act 1989, which places a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of our Looked After Children. A special responsibility of councillors for Looked After Children was conferred by the Secretary of State in a letter in 1998, in which councillors were asked to ask, "Is this good enough for my child?". All elected members are Corporate Parents. The importance of co-operation across services and between authorities was recognised in the Children Act 2004 which introduced a new duty on agencies to co-operate.

3.2 Looked After Children is a term which originates in the 1989 Children Act and describes those for whom the Council has a full or shared parental responsibility as a result of a care order being made in court, or those children the Council has accommodated as a result of a request from parents who are unable to provide for their children's care. This group is also sometimes called "Children in Public Care".

A full or shared parental responsibility can operate until a young person's 18th birthday.

3.3 There are currently (as at 23 June 2006) 1260 Looked After Children in Leeds, comprising 632 in foster care, 215 with family network carers, 125 in children's homes or residential schools, 24 living independently, 175 placed with parents, 48 placed for adoption, 15 in a secure unit or youth offending institution, and 26 in other types of accommodation, such as hospital, hospice or supported hostel.

3.4 Corporate Parenting is a collective responsibility required to be owned and shared at all levels across the Council by all elected members and officers.

3.5 The Corporate Parenting role emphasises the collective responsibility of the City Council to achieve good parenting for all children in their care. Good parenting will ensure that children achieve the five outcomes wherever possible:

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy and Achieve
- Make a Positive Contribution
- Achieve Economic Well-being

4.0 THE CURRENT POSITION

4.1 The role of elected members in terms of Corporate Parenting has in the past been associated with membership of Social Services Committee; current arrangements comprise a mixture of activities:

- Rota visits to children's homes and East Moor by elected members from wards with children's homes or a particular interest in this area;

- Attendance at Children's Advisory Panel;
- Regulation 33 reports received and considered by the Executive Member for Social Services (up to the appointment of a new Lead Executive Member for Children's Services in May 2006).

4.2 A training package is available for elected members and there are long-standing consultation arrangements with children and young people through the Children's Advisory Panel.

4.3 Officers and staff in Social Services, Education Leeds, Housing and in the Primary Care Trusts have key responsibility for our Looked After Children and Young People, and are assessed on their performance against key indicators.

5.0 PROPOSALS

It is proposed that the Council develops a Corporate Parenting Guarantee and Corporate Parenting Framework, which establish a clear strategy for the Corporate Parenting of our Looked After Children. The guarantee will describe what each looked after child can expect from their corporate parent.

6.0 THE CORPORATE PARENTING GUARANTEE

Corporate Parenting in Leeds will be provided through elected members, senior Council officers and all departmental staff and will work towards a "good parenting" entitlement for our Looked After Children

6.1 The proposed guarantee is that alongside the care and support provided to ensure each child is helped to achieve the five outcomes, we will ensure:

- That the views of our Looked After Children will be taken into account in what the Council does at all levels and a key element of the role of the Corporate Parent will be to help make sure the Council responds to their views. As a start, we will ask children and young people whether they think the name 'Corporate Parent' is the best title for this role;
- That the Children and Young People's Plan identifies our Looked After Children as a group for priority attention and will ensure there are developments to improve the five outcomes for every looked-after child;
- We will recognise the contribution that wider Council service provision (ie other than education and social care) can make to the lives of our Looked After Children and view them as an identified group for priority attention and additional services;
- That there will be an annual event involving those elected members and officers with Looked After Children responsibilities, which will support development, appraise and review outcomes, and generate a progress report direct to the Council's Corporate Management Team;
- That the Council will ensure that there is a multi-agency Looked After Children Partnership (MALAP), operating to engage a range of broader local authority, health and voluntary service input into the Corporate Parenting role;
- That the Council will investigate proposals for our Looked After Children to be given priority for school, work placements, housing and in the provision of officers who act as mentors to young people;
- That support for young people entering further and higher education will be provided throughout and after the leaving care process;
- That the feasibility of proposals for a Job Guarantee scheme within the Council and with other partners will be investigated for our Looked After Children; and

- That there is provision to ensure children receive rewards, such as letters and vouchers recognising achievement which is significant for them (e.g. 5 A-Cs at GCSE or over 95% school attendance). Other significant achievements, perhaps in sport/art/music or drama could also be acknowledged in the same way.

7.0 CORPORATE PARENTING FRAMEWORK

A Corporate Parenting framework, which enables councillors and departments to meet the guarantee, needs to be established. The framework will comprise:

- An expectation that all councillors will consider their responsibility as a parent to children looked after by the Council, as part of their overall Council work;
- A core group of councillors with a special interest in leading the work on Corporate Parenting, and who represent each of the 10 area committees in the city, to ensure city-wide coverage;
- As all councillors will hold responsibility for corporate parenting and may therefore have direct contact with these children in their role as councillor, they will all be asked to undertake a CRB check;
- All councillors will have a general awareness of their role as corporate parent;
- Specific training for councillors undertaking the 'special interest' role;
- Support to councillors to carry out the role through named officers from Social Services' Children and Families service;
- An officer nominated in each council department to take a lead role on corporate parenting;
- Establishing an overview and review process to monitor the effectiveness of corporate parenting against key performance indicators.

8.0 STEPS TO PUT THE FRAMEWORK IN PLACE

In order to ensure consistency across the city and with all our Looked After Children, the following approach is suggested:

- A programme of awareness-raising seminars will be arranged for all elected members;
- An elected member to be appointed from each area committee to take specific interest in Looked After Children in their area, including visits to children's homes. They will be supported in this role by officers from Social Services' Children and Families service;
- These elected members, officers, others as appropriate and the Director of Children's Services will participate in a two-day training programme, "Total Respect" which will be delivered by Looked After Children, supported by Leeds Children's Rights;
- A nominated senior officer from each council department will be appointed as a Looked After Children's champion.

8.1 Monitoring arrangements

- The Director of Children's Services and the elected members with specific responsibility will monitor progress towards the achievement of the Corporate Parenting Guarantee
- Looked After Children are identified as a priority group in the Children and Young People's Plan. The Director of Children's Services is accountable for monitoring the Plan and reporting through arrangements put in place by OfSTED / CSCI.
- The Director of Children's Services has an overview role, alongside that of the Lead Executive Member. It is proposed that they will meet three times per year with the 'special interest' councillors, to examine matters concerning our Looked After Children, to receive Regulation 33 reports and discuss and make

recommendations upon any issues arising from them that concern the Council's overall performance in matters of Looked After Children.

- Urgent matters arising from Regulation 33 inspections, complaints or any visit or contact by a councillor will be dealt with immediately, in the first instance by the Chief Officer for Children and Families; and otherwise by the Director of Children's Services.

9.0 RESOURCES

9.1 This framework is to be developed through joint work between elected members, officers and Looked After Children. The costs are expected to include the following and can be met from existing budget heads:

- The pilot development of Total Respect (£25,000 – £30,000) and attendance of members and officers on this training.
- A resource to investigate the feasibility of developing a job placement and guarantee scheme will be based on redirecting an officer for approximately 150 hours.
- A resource to establish the process for celebrating achievement.
- Cost of ensuring that elected members and officers with a special interest as Corporate Parents are CRB checked.

10.0 RECOMMENDATION

That Executive Board accept the recommendations contained in this report including the resource implications.