

Report of Head of Service, Looked After Children

Report to Children and Families Scrutiny Board

Date: 15th December 2016

Subject: How to make Corporate parenting everyone's business



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. The Government in the report 'Keep on Caring' will for the first time set out in law what it means to be a good corporate parent, therefore there is a need to re-look at corporate parenting arrangements and for Leeds to ensure we are providing the right support and challenge.
2. One of the challenges is how we ensure all elected members, local authority staff and the wider partnerships are aware of their responsibilities in relation to corporate parenting. How do we embed into everything we do a culture across the partnerships of improving the outcomes of looked after children and care leavers.
3. Although the Corporate Parenting Board has achieved much over the last few years, it is not a decision making body and therefore would benefit from more robust governance arrangements to ensure it is able to effect change when needed.
4. The membership of the board could be seen as quite limited and when it clashes with other meetings, attendance can be affected.

Recommendations

5. Explore making training on corporate parenting mandatory for elected members and officers.
6. That minutes of corporate parenting should be sent to scrutiny to provide greater oversight and support where needed.

7. Attendance at the Corporate Parenting meeting to be published to ensure we can evidence our commitment to children in care and care leavers.
8. Scrutiny members to meet with HAV / Care Leavers council once a year through the children and young people take over day of the Corporate Parenting Board.
9. Ensure that all relevant individuals are aware of the Corporate Parenting strategy, their responsibilities as a Corporate Parent and that the strategy is fully adhered to.
10. A deputy should be identified for each elected member who sits on the Corporate Parenting Board to represent them if they are unable to attend to improve attendance.
11. All directorates to nominate a senior officer to represent the directorate at the meeting.
12. Members of the Corporate parenting board to be given the lead for certain areas in relation to Looked After Children and Care Leavers for example, Education, Health, Leaving Care, Residential Care, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children etc.
13. For Children and Family Scrutiny to monitor the progress of the recommendation every six months.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To update Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) on the purpose and progress made by the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 1.2 To provide the Scrutiny Board with information to help to understand what corporate parenting is and to seek Scrutiny's support to strengthen corporate parenting arrangements across the council and wider partnerships.

2 Background information

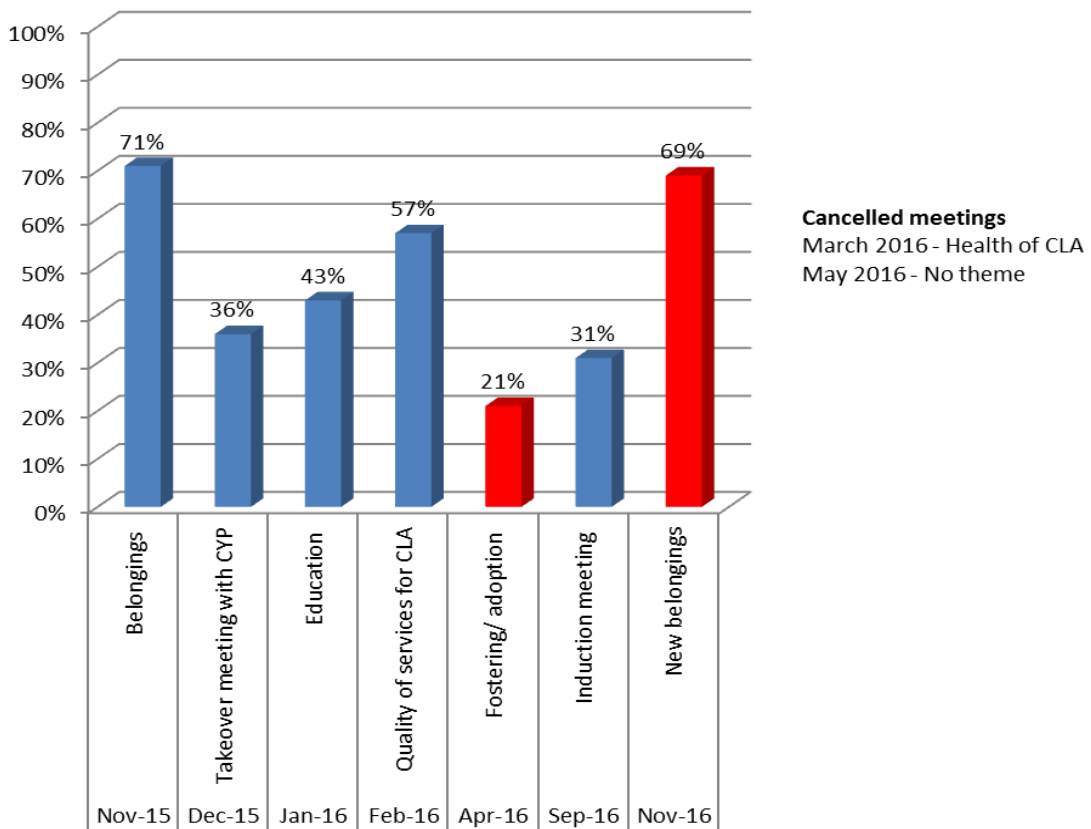
- 2.1 What is corporate parenting? When a child or young person cannot live with their birth family for whatever reason and becomes looked after, parental responsibility transfers to the local authority; this is referred to as corporate parenting. Corporate parenting was first enshrined in legislation through the Children's Act (1989). Although it does not have a formal legal definition, it is commonly understood to mean that officers and elected members of the local authority have a responsibility to take the same interest in the progress, attainments and wellbeing of looked after children and young people as a responsible parent could be expected to have for their own children. Corporate parenting also extends to care leavers, as the local authority retains a level of responsibility for former looked after children up to the age of 21, or 24 for those in full time education. According to the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS): 'corporate parenting should seek to ensure supportive relationships where young people feel cared for, not just looked after.' Good corporate parenting involves championing the rights of looked after children and care leavers, and ensuring that they have access to good services and support from the local authority, partner agencies and individual lead practitioners.
- 2.2 Why do elected members need to know about corporate parenting? Every elected member, when elected to represent their ward, becomes a corporate parent as part of their role. Whilst much of the responsibility for actually delivering care for looked after children and care leavers is delegated to staff within the children's workforce (crucially, this is not limited to professionals within the Children's Social Work Service, but applies to all members of staff who may come into contact with looked after children, including schools and healthcare practitioners), officers and staff within the local authority deliver services and support on behalf of their elected members. Frank Dobson MP, in 1998 when he was the responsible Secretary of State, characterised the role of elected members in relation to corporate parenting as follows: 'The (looked after) child has a right to expect that members of the authority are looking out for him and will protect him from harm. Therefore, given the central importance of the local authority's role in caring for looked after children and supporting them to reach their potential, all councillors should take an informed interest in how the council supports this vulnerable group.' Whilst every elected member is, by definition, a corporate parent, not all elected members will have the same knowledge and involvement. The National Children's Bureau helpfully break the corporate parenting role down into three different levels of responsibility: **Universal responsibility** – applicable to all councillors, **Targeted responsibility** – e.g. those councillors who may sit on the Corporate Parenting Board, Fostering and/or Adoption Panels, Scrutiny Boards etc, and **Specialist responsibility** – those councillors with a specific,

relevant role e.g. the Lead Member for Children's Services, Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, Chair of the Scrutiny board for Children's Services. (For more details in relation to corporate parenting see attached guide for elected members Appendix 1)

- 2.3 The function and focus of the Corporate Parenting Board. In Leeds, our Corporate Parenting Board was originally established in 2006, and is regularly refreshed to ensure that it works effectively on behalf of looked after children and care leavers. It brings together elected members from all political parties and each Area Committee across the city, as well as relevant officers within the Council, and colleagues from partner agencies. The Board has recently been strengthened to focus on specific outcomes for children, young people and care leavers. Themed meetings on, for example, health or education will consider support and services for children and young people. Directors from relevant Council directorates and other agencies such as schools and NHS bodies will be invited to attend meetings so that the Board can offer scrutiny and challenge. The Corporate Parenting Board works closely with the Have a Voice Council and the Care Leavers Council. These groups are made up of children and young people who are currently looked after or who have left the care of the local authority, and they help to advise officers and members in Leeds about their experiences of the care system, and what is important to them in terms of improving the services they receive. The Have a Voice Council helped officers to develop a list of promises from the local authority to all looked after children in our care, and the Care Leaver Council helped us to implement the national Care Leavers Charter, and they have contributed to a number of senior officer recruitment processes. The Have a Voice Council meets with a Corporate Parenting Board regularly throughout the year, and the young people attending those meetings are supported to set their own agenda and co-chair the meetings with Cllr Hayden. They also meet regularly with Cllr Hayden in the role as chair of the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 2.4 Governance arrangements for the Corporate Parenting Board – see Appendix 2
- 2.5 Key Functions of the Corporate Parenting Board. The board plays a vital role in holding to account the Council and wider partnership in relation to outcomes for looked after children and care leavers and also in helping to agree the strategic direction and priorities for services. It sets and oversees the work of the strategic Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP). The board ensures that we are meeting our responsibilities to looked after children and care leavers by regularly reviewing performance data and by themed work within the meetings. The board also has direct contact with looked after children and care leavers through the annual take over day and through meetings with the Have a Voice Council and the Care Leaver Council.
- 2.6 Strategic MALAP, Key functions. The MALAP is responsible for the implementation of key priorities as set out by the Corporate Parenting Board. It also ensures that the MALAP subgroups are clearly contributing to improving outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. It is responsible for the implementation of the Reunification Strategy. The MALAP membership is made up of strategic managers from across the council, partners, third sector and business community.

2.7 Attendance of Elected Members at the Corporate Parenting Board.

Corporate Parenting Board Attendance



2.8 What Ofsted said about the Corporate Parenting Board and corporate parenting.
 Ofsted feedback – March 2015: ‘Corporate parents, supported by an experienced and committed Lead Member, take a keen interest in looked after children and are well informed about their progress through the corporate parenting board. Success and achievement is celebrated by the authority, and there is good evidence of children’s and young people’s influence on political decision making, for example, in raising care leavers’ entitlements, and improving placement choice for looked after children’.

2.9 Work undertaken in the last year and proposed work plan for the coming year:

In the last year the Corporate Parenting Board has focused on a thematic approach to meetings with each meeting being devoted to one key theme for example, care leavers, education, health etc. it also receives annual reports in relation to adoption, Fostering and the IRO service. The Corporate Parenting Board has also been briefed regularly by the Voice and Influence team on the on-going activity of the Have a Voice and Care Leavers councils. A forward programme for the Corporate Parenting Board 2016/17 activity has been

developed and outlines the focus for each meeting of the Board for the next 12 months including;

- Health of CLA and care leavers
- Voice and Influence of children and young people
- Learning, Aspiration and Progress (Employment, Education and Training)
- New Belongings
- Quality of Services for CLA
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)
- Regionalisation of adoption services

3 Main issues

- 3.1 Leeds is committed to improving outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers who despite many years of intensive national focus and various policies/ initiatives this group remain one of the most vulnerable in society. Also for the first time the government plan to set out in law what it means to be a good corporate parent, we have a unique opportunity in Leeds to significantly improve how we deliver services to our children if we put more rigors around our Corporate Parenting approach. Therefore, we need to re-look at our current corporate parenting arrangements to ensure they will continue to deliver outcomes for the looked after children and care leavers. Scrutiny could play a critical role in providing support and challenge to ensure that this work around corporate parenting is robust and fits in with our outcomes for the city in particular in relation to Child Friendly Leeds and by ensuring that we narrow the gaps between looked after children / care leavers and their non looked after peers.
- 3.2 It is recognised that nationally and locally there is a lack of clarity across partnerships about what responsibilities of individuals and organisations in relation to corporate parenting. Due to the scope and the remit of the scrutiny boards we could develop an approach that helps to develop a culture across partnerships to ensure that the needs of looked after children and care leavers are considered in everything we do.
- 3.3 The Corporate Parenting Board in Leeds has been effective for many years, however, the new focus on corporate parenting requires us to re-think how the Corporate Parenting Board can be supported to drive up the quality of outcomes for this vulnerable group. The Corporate Parenting Board is not a decision making board, therefore a scrutiny enquiry may help to realise that more robust governance arrangements are developed to ensure the work of the Corporate Parenting Board becomes more effective.
- 3.4 The Corporate Parenting Board is well established, however, over the last few years attendance at the board has become less robust, sometimes due to the timing of the meeting clashing with other meetings – this is particularly so for Elected Members. The support of Scrutiny would be welcomed to try and address this and make attendance at the meetings more regular. Some options that could be explored would be that all Community Committees nominate two representatives so that one is always able to attend. The attendance could be published so that we are able to re-affirm the importance of this work across the partnerships. The Corporate Parenting Board may also benefit by making is a

requirement that all directorates nominate a senior officer to represent their directorate at the board.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 Members of the MALAP and Corporate Parenting Board have been consulted on the recommendation in this report.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 For all recommendations that are accepted on Equality and Diversity, Impact Assessments will be done and developed into a monitoring report to enable the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) to monitor progress.

4.3 Council policies and Best Council Plan

4.3.1 This section is not relevant to this report.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 Any resource in relation to the recommendations should be agreed by the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services).

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 This report does not contain any exempt or confidential information.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 This section is not relevant to this report.

5 Conclusions

5.1 It is clear that the Corporate Parenting Board is helping to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people. However, changes to the law mean that for the first time the government will set out what it means to be a good corporate parent. If the recommendation in this report are accepted this will help to strengthen our current arrangements in relation to corporate parenting.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Explore making training on corporate parenting mandatory for elected members and officers.

6.2 That minutes of corporate parenting should be sent to scrutiny to provide greater oversight and support where needed.

6.3 Attendance at the Corporate Parenting meeting to be published to ensure we can evidence our commitment to children in care and care leavers.

- 6.4 Scrutiny members to meet with HAV / Care Leavers council once a year through the children and young people take over day of the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 6.5 Ensure that all relevant individuals are aware of the Corporate Parenting strategy, their responsibilities as a Corporate Parent and that the strategy is fully adhered to.
- 6.6 A deputy should be identified for each elected member who sits on the Corporate Parenting Board to represent them if they are unable to attend to improve attendance.
- 6.7 All directorates to nominate a senior officer to represent the directorate at the meeting.
- 6.8 Members of the Corporate parenting board to be given the lead for certain areas in relation to Looked After Children and Care Leavers for example, Education, Health, Leaving Care, Residential Care, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children etc.
- 6.9 For Children and Family Scrutiny to monitor the progress of the recommendation every six months.

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.