

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 16 November 2011

Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services

Corporate Parenting

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Scrutiny Committee of the Council's responsibilities in relation to Corporate Parenting for children in care and to inform Scrutiny Committee of the Corporate Parenting Strategy which enables the Council to meet its responsibilities.

Background

2. Children become looked after when they are accommodated by the local authority on a voluntary agreement with the family or they are subject to care orders as a result of court direction because they are suffering or likely to suffer from significant harm. If children become looked after as a result of being made subject of a Care Order the Care Order remains effective until the child is eighteen unless an application is made either by a parent carer or the local authority to discharge the Care Order. The Local Authority also has responsibilities post eighteen under the Care Leavers Act to ensure the young people who have been in care continue to receive support which may be in some instances until they are twenty-five.
3. When a child enters care the state takes on a huge responsibility for those children by agreeing to undertake the parental role on a day to day basis. That means that all those working for the state at a local level, every Councillor, Director of Children's Services, Social Worker or Teacher should demand no less for each child in care than they would for their own child. This is the essence of Corporate Parenting.
4. Frequent changes of Social Workers is one of the main problems looked after children raise, the Directorate has a Workforce Strategy which aims to have sufficient qualified and experienced permanent Social Worker's in place to discharge the Corporate Parenting role.
5. Historically outcomes for children in care have been poor and whilst there has been some improvement in recent years narrowing the gap between outcomes for children in care and those of other children in the borough continues to be a challenge. Education outcomes for looked after children in the borough are rising these results will be presented to committee at the March 2012 meeting.
6. It is the strategy of the Children's Partnership to provide services to support families to avoid the need for children to become looked after but where this becomes

necessary it is incumbent on the Local Authority acting as the Corporate Parent to ensure that the care experience is a positive one, that we have high aspirations for children in our care and that we provide the support and services required to improve outcomes for them. They are in fact our children and we should not compound their previous childhood experiences by providing poor standards of care and support.

7. The Director of Children's Services and Cabinet Member both have roles set out in statutory guidance for discharging of their responsibilities as a Corporate Parent for children in care and ensuring they are prioritised across Children's Services. The statutory guidance relating to the role of the Cabinet Member and Director of Children's Services is contained in the document entitled 'The Roles and Responsibilities of the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services'. This publication can be found at <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-00686-2009>. Paragraph 2.20 -2.23(Cabinet Member) and 3.36 – 3.38 (Director) are the relevant sections that apply to Corporate Parenting.
8. Children in care have been identified as a priority group within the Children and Young People's Plan and the 2011 Children and Young People's Plan focuses specifically on reducing the numbers of children who become looked after by the Council and ensuring as many children as possible are supported through early intervention and support services to remain with their birth families.
9. The Council is currently looking after 653 children, this has been a rising trend over a number of years with a significant rise since the Baby Peter case in Haringey. This reflects a national trend with many authorities with previously stable looked after numbers showing significant rises.
10. As part of the council commitment to supporting young people who are looked after there is an established Corporate Parenting Board which consists of elected members and key officers representing each of the Directorates within the Council. The Corporate Parenting Board has recently reviewed its terms of reference which are attached as **Appendix 1**. The draft Corporate Parenting Strategy which will be presented to the Board for approval is attached at **Appendix 2**.
11. The Leader of the Council has agreed that the Corporate Parenting Board with its new terms of reference will be re launched prior to the council meeting on the 28th November 2011 and that the membership will be extended to include an invitation to all cabinet members and shadow cabinet members.
12. Attached at **Appendix 3** is the annual report for looked after children which provides information regarding the outcomes for our looked after children and the activities that have taken place with partner agencies and the council to support improving performance.
13. It is important in all of our work with looked after children that we listen to what they say themselves about their care experience and that we consult with them about the type and range of support and services they need to enable us to meet our Corporate Parenting Strategies.

14. Attached at **Appendix 4** is the Dudley Pledge for Looked after Children which was informed and developed by children themselves and in particular the Children in Care Council which is a regular forum where children and young people can meet with elected Members and senior members of the Council to influence future support and the provision of services. The Children in Care Council's terms of reference is attached at **Appendix 5**.

Finance

15. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Law

16. The legislation and guidance which relates both generally and specifically to looked after children and care leavers is the Children Act 1989, the Children Leaving Care Act 2000, Adoption Children Act 2002, the Children Act 2004, the Children and Young People's Act 2008.

Equality Impact

17. Implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy will contribute to the improved outcomes for looked after children and assist the Council in the discharge of its Corporate Parenting responsibilities. The Council has a specific responsibility to looked after children to ensure they are not being disadvantaged whilst being in care and that they are supported in their education, emotional and social well being.

Recommendation

18. That Scrutiny Committee recognises the Council's role in Corporate Parenting to children in care and identifies areas for a priority action for the Council in seeking to further improve outcomes during 2011/12.



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