

COUNCIL

3RD SEPTEMBER, 2014

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

1. **Purpose**

The Terms of Reference for the Corporate Parenting Panel provides for an Annual Report to be produced for full Council, as detailed at Appendix 1 to the circulated report.

The Report outlines the work of the Panel over the last year and highlights the progress that has been made. It also identifies future work of the Panel and some of the initiatives and actions it will aim to achieve in 2014/15.

Since this Annual Report was prepared the Information and Fun Day for Looked After Children has taken place. The Event was a success and was enjoyed by all that attended. A detailed evaluation of the event will be considered at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

2. **Recommendation**

That Council notes the report.

3. **List of Background Papers**

CSSIW Inspection Report of Children's Social Services in Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council January 2014.

Children and Young People Services Strategic Improvement Plan 2013-2016.

4. **Wards Affected**

All

5. **Officer Contact**

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Appendix 1

Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2013/14

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Chair's Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to present the first Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Panel. I decided to set up this Panel of Members to ensure the children the Council look after have the same opportunities as others in the County Borough and to ensure the Council is undertaking its duty as corporate parents. This includes Elected Members having responsibility for ensuring that Looked After Children receive a standard of care that they would deem good enough for their own children.

The Care Leavers and Foster Carers representatives who sit on the Panel have provided an invaluable contribution. They have provided an insight into the issues faced by those they represent and provide a constant reminder of the impact decisions have on them. I would like to thank them for their contribution. I would also like to thank the Elected Members on the Panel for their attendance, commitment and enthusiasm. The guidance and support of officers given to the Panel has ensured that the work of the Panel has made an impact at a quick pace.

Reading through the Annual Report it is an opportunity to reflect on the challenges and successes of the Panel. The work programme for the first year of the Panel has focussed on three key areas:

- Educational attainment
- Accommodation for Care Leavers
- Revising and updating the Council's Corporate Parenting Policy

Good progress has been made in all of these areas, which is outlined throughout this report. The forthcoming year will see further development and I have no doubt that the Panel will continue to play an important role in improving outcomes for children under the care of the Council.

One of the first achievements for the 2014/15 civic year will be the Information and Fun Day being arranged in July. This event will demonstrate the commitment of Council, both officers and Elected Members, to our looked after children. It will also be an opportunity to consult on some important policies and provide them with information on what they can expect from us. Other areas of work will include Member development and training in their role as Corporate Parents.

All Elected Members are corporate parents and I hope the work undertaken by the Panel, which is outlined in this report, will be of

interest to you. It may also assist Members in identifying opportunities for their development and understanding.

Councillor Alun Thomas OBE
Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel.

1. Introduction

The main aim of this report is to highlight the work that has been undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Panel during 2013/14. It outlines future work of the Panel and some of the initiatives and actions it will aim to achieve in 2014/15. The document may also facilitate discussions on items that could be included within the work programme for 2014/2015.

The Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales invoked their Serious Concerns Protocol in relation to Children's Services in Neath Port Talbot Council in November 2012. The delivery of safeguarding services to children and young people was identified as being in significant need of improvement. In response to the recommendations made by the Inspectorate the Council developed and implemented a Strategic Improvement Plan. As part of this work it was identified that there was a significant gap in relation to Elected Members understanding their Corporate Parenting role. With the assistance of the Independent Support Team, two Corporate Parenting All Member Seminars were held. The recommendation resulting from these events was that a Corporate Parenting Panel was set up and it was agreed by full Council that the Panel would be established during the 2013/14 Civic Year.

The Corporate Parenting Panel met for the first time in July 2013. The Terms of Reference for the Panel provides for an Annual Report to be produced by the Panel to full Council.

The Panel is chaired by the Leader of the Council and is made up of twelve Elected Members, including the Cabinet Members for Children and Young People and Education and Lifelong Learning. A Foster Carer Representative and two Care Leaver Representatives are also invited to the Panel. Support is given to the Panel by the Scrutiny Team, the Director of Social Services, Health and Housing, the Head of Children's Services and other Council officers as and when required.

During the most recent Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales Inspection of Children's Services, the Inspectors observed a meeting of the Panel and the Report from November 2013 stated the following:

“A Corporate Parenting Panel has been convened and although still in the development stage is making progress in beginning to look at how it can drive improved outcomes for children and young people.”

The Inspectors’ visit was during the early stages of the Panel and was a fair reflection of the position at that time. Since then the Panel has made quick progress and has begun to set its own agenda and drive forward work to improve outcomes for Looked After Children.

2. The Work of the Corporate Parenting Panel during 2013/2014 and Future Actions

Purpose of Panel

Looked After Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society and improving the lives of these children is a national priority. Providing care and support for them is the job of staff employed by the Council, partner agencies, foster carers and Elected Members. The Council’s Elected Members all have a role as ‘corporate parents’ and this means that they are responsible for ensuring that Looked After Children receive a standard of care that they would deem good enough for their own children. The role of the Corporate Parenting Panel is to champion the rights of these children and young people to ensure their needs are being met, they are safe and have the best chances in life.

Number of Meetings

The Corporate Parenting Panel meets on a six weekly basis and there have been nine meetings in the 2013/14 Civic Year.

The Work Programme

The Work Programme included:

- Agreeing the Terms of Reference for the Panel, included in Appendix 1.
- To commission relevant data and information to assist Members of the Panel with agreeing priority areas.
- Improving Educational Attainment for Looked After Children.
- Improving accommodation options for Care Leavers.

- To revise and update Corporate Parenting Policy.
- To develop a new Online Safety Policy for Looked After Children.
- To monitor information that impacts on Looked After Children and hold partners and officers to account.
- To arrange an information and fun day for Looked After Children.

Corporate Parenting Policy

Progress so far:

It was highlighted to the Panel that the current Corporate Parenting Policy was out of date and it was a lengthy and cumbersome document. The Panel considered different styles and content of policies from other areas. Members commissioned an updated and more accessible Policy to be developed based on their preferred style. A draft Policy has been completed.

Future Actions:

Following further consultation with children and young people the final Corporate Parenting Policy will be reported to Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board for formal agreement in September 2014 and will subsequently be taken to full Council for formal adoption.

Online Safety Policy

Progress so far:

Following a report to the Panel on safeguarding it was noted that there was a gap in clear guidance for online safety for Looked After Children. The Panel commissioned an Online Safety Policy to be written and the draft Policy has now been developed by a working group and considered by the Panel.

Future Actions:

Further consultation on the Policy will be undertaken with Foster Carers and Children and Young People. The Policy will be reported to Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Board for formal

adoption. The final Policy will be included in the packs that are given to Foster Carers to provide them with further and up to date guidance.

Improving Educational Attainment for Looked After Children

Progress so far:

The Panel requested data and information on the educational attainment of Looked After Children to be presented to them.

Appendix 2 is an example of some of the data that was considered by the Panel. In examining this data it became apparent that the attainment of Looked After Children was significantly lower than any other group. It was agreed that earlier intervention was required and in particular to concentrate on literacy levels. The Panel directed officers to develop an action plan for a co-ordinated approach to targeting literacy support for Looked After Children.

The development of the action plan was co-ordinated by the Head of Learning and Inclusion and the Looked After Children Education Officer. The action plan has been supported by the Panel and has started to be implemented.

Future Actions:

The plan has been implemented since February 2014 and success will be measured in July 2015 when reading scores will be available to compare three years' worth of performance data. Success will also be measured against key milestones within the action plan which will be reported to the Panel on a quarterly basis. The proof will be translating the actions into improved literacy levels for Looked After Children.

A Policy is also currently being developed to complement this work and will reflect the actions and expectations within the plan. The draft Policy will be considered to the Corporate Parenting Panel in July 2014. Once the Panel is satisfied with the draft Policy it will be taken to Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Board for approval.

Accommodation for Care Leavers

Progress so far:

Accommodation for Care Leavers was raised as an area that required significant improvement. It was recognised that some Care Leavers were ending up in Bed and Breakfasts or private rented accommodation which was not suitable. The Panel tasked the Director of Social Services, Health and Housing to take forward improvement work in this area.

Registered Social Landlords that operate in the County Borough were engaged with to establish if they were willing to work in partnership and what they could offer. A matching exercise was undertaken between the Care Leavers requiring accommodation, their level of need, the accommodation available and the allocated budget.

From the matching exercise it became apparent that there is a sufficient supply and good mix of accommodation and in future this should result in no-one being placed in Bed and Breakfast or private residential accommodation that does not meet the Council's standards. The only exception to this will be in emergency situations. Elected Members can have assurances that the Council is now in a position such that:

- No young person will be placed in accommodation which does not meet the Council's standards.
- The amount of accommodation which is available, including the 'new' accommodation is of a good standard.
- That there is sufficient accommodation to meet all of the levels of support requirements.

There have been some additional outcomes from the project, which has included identifying contracts with some providers that require re-negotiation. The management of contracts and relationships will be specifically included in the design of the Common Commissioning Unit, proposed for the Social Services, Health and Housing Directorate.

The project has also resulted in greatly improved interaction and relationships between Children's Social Care and the Housing

Options Service, which will lead to greater responsiveness and flexibility about future accommodation requirements. It has also helped to address issues around intentionally homeless. However, the new legislative framework for homelessness, which takes effect in April next year, is likely to require the Council to consider which if any specific categories it intends to exclude from the Intentionality Test. In the meantime as noted above, Children's Social Care and Housing Options will be working closely to continue to ensure that every possible opportunity to avoid the application of this test is taken in respect of young people for whom the Council is Corporate Parent.

The work around accommodation for care leavers will significantly improve the outcomes for Care Leavers and is a major achievement for the Panel. The recommendations put forward by the Panel was reported to Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board on 19th June 2014 and adopted as Council policy.

Future Actions:

Monitoring of this project will be on-going and six monthly update reports will be scheduled into the work programme. The monitoring reports will set out the available supply of accommodation, together with matching of available supply to Care Leavers' needs and certify that all accommodation allocated is of a suitable standard.

At a future meeting of the Panel there will be a presentation on the workings of contracts with Housing organisations that have an impact on Care Leavers.

Future Satisfaction Survey will be undertaken with Care Leavers regarding their experiences of accommodation which will be benchmarked with available national data and with Councils which have an outstanding or good reputation for their Children's Service. This information will be feedback to the Panel periodically.

Information and Fun Day

Progress so far:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is planning an Information and Fun Day for Looked After Children. The day will be an opportunity to provide information to children, young people and their carers about the role of corporate parents and their responsibilities. It will also be an opportunity to consult on policies and services to ensure they are fit for purpose. It will demonstrate the commitment of the Council to children and young people and be a fun day.

Several activities will be taking place during the day that are linked to the main sections in the draft Corporate Parenting Policy and the Council's Improvement priorities. These will include: healthy activities (such as smoothie bike and rugby skills), recycling activities and games, the rolling zone, consultation activities and lots more. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel will be at the event and will be getting involved in the activities.

Future Actions:

Following the event a feedback report will be developed by the Panel and circulated to all Members.

The consultations on the Corporate Parenting Policy and the Online Safety Policy will be feed into the Equality Impact Assessments that will form part of the reports for Scrutiny and Cabinet Board.

Consultation

Progress so far:

The other role the Corporate Parenting Panel has been as an additional consultation forum for policies such as, the Finance Policy for Foster Carers, regionalisation of adoption services and safeguarding.

Future Actions:

The Panel will continue with a consultation role as and when required.

3. Challenges

In undertaking its work the Panel has faced several challenges, which have included:

- Identifying care leavers and foster carer representatives to be invited to meetings of the Panel. A Foster Carer Representative regularly attends the meetings. Care Leaver representatives have been identified and they have attended meetings, however, further encouragement is required for them to attend on a regular basis.
- Identifying priority areas and the development of a work programme. It was important to not cross over with the work of other groups and avoid duplication. Where appropriate the work of the Panel should dovetail and compliment other work.
- Identifying and commissioning the relevant data and information for Members of the Panel to be able have a full picture of the situation for Looked After Children. This has been achieved for educational attainment and a lot of data was requested and considered by the Panel. However, there are other areas which the Panel will need to consider (for example, health).
- Developing mechanisms to ensure all Elected Members are aware of the work the Panel is undertaking and their role and responsibilities as Corporate Parents. Also identifying suitable training and development opportunities for Members. Work in this area is still on-going and will be a priority for the Panel during 2014/15.

4. Future Work

The previous section of the report provides an overview of the work carried out by the Panel since its inception. It has made good progress over the short period of time and the next step is to consider the future work of the Panel. So far, the following areas have been identified:

- Stability of placements, which is included in the work programme for 2014/15.
- The Panel wants to ensure that all Elected Members understand their role as Corporate Parents and have access to appropriate information. This work will be progressed during 2014/15 and will include improving information mechanisms, guidance and training for Elected Members.
- Other areas of work identified by the Panel, which will improve the outcomes for Looked After Children, will be added to the Forward Work Programme.
- Revision of the Terms of Reference to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

5. Conclusions

It has been a busy year for the Corporate Parenting Panel and progress has been made in a number of key areas, as outlined in the report. The action taken by the Panel to address educational attainment, accommodation for care leavers and the revision of the Corporate Parenting Policy will have a significant impact on improving the outcomes for Looked After Children. The acid test will be in evaluating and monitoring what the impacts have been.

The Report highlights future areas of work and development and Members will be kept informed of the progress of the Panel. The Panel looks forward to bringing further information to Members and reporting on progress.

6. Contact Information

The Corporate Parenting Panel is supported by the Scrutiny Team located in the Chief Executive's Democratic Services Department and their contact details follow:

Name	Position	Contact Details
Catherine Gadd	Scrutiny Officer	E-mail c.gadd@npt.gov.uk Tel: 01639 763118
Neil Evans	Senior Scrutiny and Member Development Officer	E-mail g.n.evans@npt.gov.uk Tel: 01639 763747

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

TERMS OF REFERENCE/MEMBERSHIP

1. A Corporate Parenting Panel is formally established as part of the Annual Meeting arrangements with clear terms of reference, membership and reporting lines.
2. The Panel to meet six weekly in the first year.
3. The terms of reference are:
 - To ensure looked after children and young people are seen as a priority by the whole of the Council and its partners.
 - Scrutinise the policies, opportunities and procedures in place across the Council to support looked after children and young people in achieving their potential and make recommendations, where appropriate to the Cabinet, for improvement.
 - Gather the views of, and act as advocate for looked after children and young people and care leavers.
 - To monitor and evaluate the responsiveness of partners in supporting children and young people looked after to achieve their potential.
 - To hold officers and partners to account.
4. Membership
 - Chairman: Cllr A H Thomas (Leader of the Council)
 - Cllr P A Rees
 - Cllr P D Richards
 - Cllr Mrs K Pearson
 - Cllr M Harvey
 - Cllr Ms C Morgans
 - Cllr S Paddison
 - Cllr S Rahaman
 - Cllr I B James
 - Cllr D Keogh
 - Cllr M Ellis
 - Cllr J D Morgan

Attendees to include:

- Foster Parent
- Care Leaver
- Director of Social Services, Health and Housing
- Head of Children and Young People
- Principal Officer with responsibility for looked after children
- Education Co-ordinator
- Others subject to the business of the Committee (to include wider partners)

5. Initial Work Programme

To include:

- To prepare a corporate parenting policy statement.
- To understand the outcomes being achieved by looked after children in Neath Port Talbot and identify areas where improvement work should be concentrated in the first instance, starting with improving educational achievements.
- Ensuring all elected members have appropriate opportunities to ensure they fully understand their corporate parenting responsibilities. This is to include initial induction, clear role descriptions, and suitable training and guidance.
- To commission suitable information to support Elected Members in their corporate parenting roles. To include identifying what information is important, what insight it provides for Members and how to determine if the information is highlighting good or poor performance.
- Reporting Arrangement –letter from Panel Chairperson to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. Letter from chairperson to other Members as appropriate. Annual report from the Panel to full Council.

Appendix 2

2013 National Tests - Age Standardised Scores by Year Group for LAC & Non LAC Pupils											
NCY	Literacy Test - English						Numeracy Test				
	Non LAC Pupils No's	Non LAC Ave Score	LAC Pupils No's	LAC Ave Score	Diff (LAC - non LAC)		Non LAC Pupils No's	Non LAC Ave Score	LAC Pupils No's	LAC Ave Score	Diff (LAC - non LAC)
2	1215	105.7	24	99.2	-6.5		1475	98.8	24	90.0	-8.8
3	1464	103.1	15	91.9	-11.1		1562	99.3	15	92.1	-7.2
4	1401	101.9	23	88.4	-13.4		1392	98.7	23	86.0	-12.7
5	1329	103.0	20	92.3	-10.7		1322	99.1	20	92.6	-6.5
6	1347	104.7	16	92.8	-11.9		1344	98.3	16	89.2	-9.2
7	1468	100.5	16	85.8	-14.7		1460	100.0	16	92.1	-7.9
8	1475	103.2	24	97.0	-6.2		1471	100.5	24	91.2	-9.3
9	1529	100.6	18	89.1	-11.5		1523	99.9	18	89.6	-10.4
All	11228	102.7	156	92.5	-10.2		11549	99.4	156	90.2	-9.2

