

**Corporate
Parenting Panel
Annual Report
2014/15**

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Chair's Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to present the Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Panel for 2014-15. I decided to set up this Panel of Members in July 2013 to make certain that the Council was undertaking its duties as Corporate Parents and to ensure that children the Council look after have the same opportunities as others in the County Borough. Part of the role of a Corporate Parent is ensuring that Looked After Children receive a standard of care that we would deem good enough for our own children.

I would like to thank the Foster Carer representative, who sits on the Panel, for providing an invaluable contribution. I would also like to thank the Elected Members on the Panel for their attendance, commitment and enthusiasm, which has resulted in another productive year. The guidance and support of officers given to the Panel has ensured that it continues to make a difference to the outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

Reading through the Annual Report it is an opportunity to reflect on the challenges and successes of the Panel over the last civic year. The work programme for 2014/15 has focussed on the following key areas:

- Educational attainment
- Continued monitoring and improvement of accommodation for Care Leavers
- The Looked After Children Information and Fun Day
- Representation of Looked After Children in Youth Justice System

Good progress has been made in all of these areas, which is outlined throughout this report.

In 2015/16 the Panel will continue the work to improve educational attainment and accommodation for care leavers, in particular addressing the anticipated surge in demand for accommodation and the impact of the 'When I am Ready' arrangements. The Panel will also be focussing on aspects of health for children in the care of the Council.

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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.

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1. Introduction

The main aim of this report is to highlight the work that has been undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Panel during 2014/15. It outlines future work of the Panel and some of the initiatives and actions it will aim to achieve in 2015/16. The document may also facilitate discussions on other items that could be included within the work programme for 2015/2016.

The Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) invoked their Serious Concerns Protocol in relation to Children's Services in Neath Port Talbot Council in November 2012. As part of the improvement 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 Terms of Reference for the Panel provides for an Annual Report to be produced to full Council. The Panel has now been in place for two years.

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 and the Chair of Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee. A Foster Carer Representative also attends the Panel. Support is given to the Panel by the Democratic Services Team, the Director of Social Services, Health and Housing, the Head of Children's Services and other Council officers as and when required.

A further CSSIW inspection was undertaken in February 2015, which focussed on whether sufficient progress had been made to improve the quality and consistency of services for children and young people in need of support or protection, including those who were looked after and care leavers. The Inspectors also evaluated the potential for the Local Authority to sustain and further develop improvements in the Service. Upon completion of

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the CSSIW Inspection Report; the Chief Inspector took the decision to remove Neath Port Talbot's Children's Services from the Serious Concerns Protocol.

The Inspection Report from February 2015 stated the following key findings in relation to the Corporate Parenting Panel:

“Corporate parenting arrangements were being embedded and starting to make a real difference but concerted effort will be required to ensure ongoing success”.

This was further explained in the report:

“Elected members were able to give examples of what difference ‘corporate parenting’ has made to the outcomes for children and young people who were receiving services. These included supporting opportunities for looked after children to achieve academically and increasing the supported housing options for care leavers. There was a commitment to ensure young people were no longer placed in unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation. This showed a critical change from previous inspections when corporate parenting was seen as passive rather than proactive.”

These findings highlight the progress that the Panel had made since its inception. The work of the Panel needs to be sustained to ensure that there continues to be improved outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

2. The Work of the Corporate Parenting Panel during 2014/2015 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

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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. The Panel monitors information that impacts on Looked After Children and hold partners and officers to account.

Number of Meetings

The Corporate Parenting Panel meets on a six weekly basis and there were 7 meetings held in the 2014/15 Civic Year.

The Work Programme

The Work Programme included:

- Commissioning 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.
- Monitoring stability of placement arrangements.
- Arranging and holding an information and fun day for Looked After Children.
- Monitoring the number of Looked After Children involved in the Youth Justice System.
- Receiving information on safeguarding arrangements for Looked After Children.

Policies

Progress so far:

In the last annual report it was stated that a draft Corporate Parenting Policy had been developed. Following further consultation with children and young people the final Policy was approved by the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet

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Board in September 2014 and was taken to full Council for formal adoption on 15th October 2014.

The Online Safety Policy for foster parents was also approved by the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Board on 22nd September 2014. The final Policy is included in the packs that are given to Foster Carers to provide them with further and up to date guidance. Since its implementation the Fostering Network has recognised this Policy as an example of good practice.

Future Actions:

The Panel will commission the development of relevant policies as and when required. Any policies developed will be considered and formally approved by the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board.

Information and Fun Day

Progress so far:

One of the first achievements for the Corporate Parenting Panel during 2014/15 was holding an Information and Fun Day for Looked After Children on 30th July 2014. The event demonstrated the commitment of the Council, both officers and Elected Members, to our Looked After Children. It was also an opportunity to consult on some important policies. The event was made possible by the generous support of sponsors and partners. Elected Members played a key role in securing sponsorship and had a big impact on making the event a success.

More than 150 children, young people and their foster carers attended on the day. The emphasis of the event was having fun and the opportunity was also taken to get feedback from children and young people on several areas to find out what is important to them to help shape how they are cared for. The occasion allowed Looked After Children and their carers to get together to make

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new friends and share their experiences. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel got involved in different activities and enjoyed interacting with those that attended. Members also had the opportunity to explain what a corporate parent is and their role, which provided children, young people and carers with a better understanding of who champions their interests and ensures the Council delivers the services required.

The event was very successful and it achieved its aims. The contribution from Council officers and partners ensured it ran smoothly and demonstrated the benefits of partnership working. An event report was completed and all sent to all Elected Members for their information.

Future Actions:

An event framework has been established to assist with any future planned events.

Improving Educational Attainment for Looked After Children

Progress so far:

The Panel recognised that the attainment of Looked After Children was significantly lower than any other group and it was agreed that earlier intervention was required and in particular to concentrate on literacy levels. During 2013/14 the Panel had 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 then Head of Learning and Inclusion and the Looked After Children Education Officer. The action plan has been supported by the Panel and was implemented during 2014/15. A Policy was also developed to support the action plan and was formally approved by the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Board on 4th December 2014.

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The Panel regularly monitors the action plan and receives quarterly update reports. In addition Members request data and information that is relevant to the educational attainment of Looked After Children to ensure that sufficient progress continues to be made in this area.

The Panel has been proactive in addressing this issue which has become a national priority. The Panel developed and submitted a consultation response to the Welsh Government's consultation on raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales.

Future Actions:

A method of measuring success needs to be established. As a starting point three years of performance data is available in 2015 to compare. It will also be measured against the key milestones within the action plan which will be reported to the Panel on a quarterly basis.

The National curriculum reforms and changes to national literacy and numeracy arrangements proposed by Welsh Government will have an impact in this area. How it influences the attainment of Looked After Children in Neath Port Talbot will be considered by the Panel in due course. The Panel will also consider the final policy on raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales, once it has been produced by the Welsh Government.

Accommodation for Care Leavers

Progress so far:

Accommodation for Care Leavers was identified as an area that required significant improvement. The Corporate Parenting Panel highlighted the need to ensure that all young care leavers are in suitable and appropriate accommodation. The Panel tasked the Director of Social Services, Health and Housing to take forward

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improvement work in this area and significant work was undertaken during 2014/15.

In 2014 a commitment was given to ensure that Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation was only used in absolutely the most emergency situations. Since this commitment there have been very few instances where care leavers have needed to be placed temporarily in B&B accommodation whilst alternative accommodation was identified. In cases where this has happened a range of accommodation options had been explored, all of which had broken down, including: family arrangements, supported lodgings, private rented accommodation and housing tenancies. The B&B arrangements were temporary and in all cases alternative arrangements were put in place. When it is unavoidable that young people need to use B&B accommodation the leaving care service ensures that there is a plan in place to move young people on and that there are arrangements for monitoring them, which can include daily contact with the young person.

Children and Young People Services have continued to develop relationships with Housing Options. Support has been made available to access housing for young people 18+ in emergency situations where they have been unable to access supported accommodation.

Monitoring of this project has been on-going through six monthly update reports. The workings of contracts with Housing organisations that have an impact on Care Leavers have also been presented to the Panel.

Future Actions:

It has been noted that there will be a surge in demand for accommodation for care leavers in the next few years due to the current number of Looked After Children. In addition in April 2016 the 'When I'm ready' arrangements come into force under part 6 of the Social Services and Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014. The arrangements set out the requirements for young people to remain in their foster placement until they are ready for independence. Children and Young People Services are currently

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working in conjunction with the finance, housing benefits and welfare rights departments to develop a policy to deliver the requirements of the scheme which needs to be implemented prior to April 2016. A Working Group has been established to ensure there will be adequate provision of housing accommodation and to review existing commissioning arrangements with housing providers. The Panel will receive regular updates in this area to ensure progress is being made.

Stability of Placement

Progress so far:

Placement stability is key to securing better outcomes for children in care. Local authorities have a duty to secure a sufficient range of placements to meet the needs of looked after children in their area. The Corporate Parenting Panel has requested reports to ensure that an appropriate Placement Strategy and arrangements are in place in Neath Port Talbot. The main focus has been on the number of placement moves and the reasons behind them. Since July 2014 the Service has developed the mechanism for reporting on placement breakdowns, and they are now easily able to distinguish between planned placement moves and placement breakdowns.

Future Actions:

The Panel will continue to receive regular updates on the number of placement moves and any other relevant information in relation to progress in this area.

Youth Offending

Progress so far:

The Corporate Parenting Panel were informed that despite the reduction in first time entrants to the criminal justice system, and the welcome drop in the number of children imprisoned in Wales and England, Looked After Children (LAC) were over represented in the Youth Justice System. The key issues were highlighted and progress against these issues has been reported back to the

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Panel. There have been positive developments within Neath Port Talbot and the Panel was pleased to note the reduction in the numbers of LAC in the Youth Justice Service.

Future Actions:

The Panel will continue to be updated at regular intervals on the numbers of LAC in Neath Port Talbot involved with the Youth Justice System and related issues. Where appropriate the Panel will challenge areas that require further improvement.

Safeguarding

Progress so far:

The Panel has received information in relation to safeguarding issues for Looked After Children, such as inspection and audit reports. Through receiving this information the Panel has been reassured that appropriate mechanisms are in place to safeguard children and young people who are in care of the Local Authority.

One of the recommendations from the Internal Audit report on Safeguarding Children – children who go missing and children at risk of sexual exploitation (June 2014) - was for consideration be given to inviting a Health representative to sit on the Corporate Parenting Panel. This recommendation has been actioned and a representative from the Health Board regularly attends the meeting.

Members of the Panel and Members of the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board, were invited to attend awareness raising training on preventing child sexual exploitation. Feedback from the Members that attended was that it was very useful and informative and they have suggested that the awareness raising training is made available to all Members.

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Future actions:

Members of the Panel will continue to receive any relevant information in relation to safeguarding Looked After Children and they will be invited to appropriate training as and when required.

3. Challenges

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

- Care Leaver representatives were attending meetings of the Panel, however, this is no longer the case. Further discussions will be held with relevant officers in identifying and encouraging care leaver representatives to attend meetings on a regular basis or alternative mechanisms to be established for their input into the work of the Panel. The input of children and young people is important to help shape the services they receive.
- Identifying priority areas and the development of the work programme. It was important to not cross over with the work of other groups and to avoid duplication. Where appropriate the work of the Panel should dovetail and compliment other work.
- 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.

4. Future Work

The previous section of the report provides an overview of the work carried out by the Panel during 2014/15. It has continued to make good progress and the next step is to consider the future

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work of the Panel. So far, the following areas have been identified:

- Continue to monitor areas prioritised by the Panel and, where necessary, challenge areas of concern and put actions in place for improvement. This includes: Representation of Looked After Children in the Youth Offending Service, Accommodation for Care Leavers, Educational Attainment for Looked After Children and Stability of Placement.
- The Panel wants to ensure that all Elected Members understand their role as Corporate Parents and have access to appropriate information. An all Member Seminar on Corporate Parenting has been arranged for 22nd October 2015.
- There is a regular representative from the Health Board and Members of the Panel have requested information to ensure that the health requirements of Looked After Children are being met, which has been programmed into the work programme.
- 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 as and when identified.
- Review of the Terms of Reference to ensure they remain fit for purpose. Should changes be considered necessary, then a report to full Council will be made.

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 continued action taken by the Panel to address educational attainment, accommodation for care leavers and the Looked After Children in the Youth Justice System will have a

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significant impact on improving the outcomes for Looked After Children. The Panel needs to ensure that there is effective evaluation and monitoring of the impacts and outcomes of this work.

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 Democratic Services Team located in the Chief Executive's Department and contact details follow:

Name	Position	Contact Details
Catherine Gadd	Democratic Services Officer	c.gadd@npt.gov.uk 01639 763118