

Meeting title	CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Meeting date	9 September 2013
Report title	Recommendations for Strengthening the Corporate Parenting Committee
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At the last meeting of this Committee, a report was presented which outlined options for developing the City's Corporate Parenting responsibilities with a recommendation to formulate a plan of action. Discussions held within the Committee and subsequent meetings have highlighted the need to strengthen the governance arrangements in order to establish a corporate parenting structure which places Southampton in the strongest position to deliver its responsibilities as a corporate parent
- 1.2 A regional meeting took place in December 2012, hosted by West Sussex, to provide an opportunity for Members and officers to share best practice regarding the delivery of effective corporate parenting and explore options for developing a regional network to complement the work of the South East Lead Members and Directors of Children Services Group.
- 1.3 A further meeting is taking place on the 29th October and this will be hosted by Southampton. It is envisaged that good practice examples, both in terms of the constitution for the Corporate Parenting Committee and ideas to improve outcomes for children looked after, will be shared. This may further inform the City's governance arrangements and subsequent action planning process in order to improve outcomes for children looked after in Southampton.
- 1.4 This report highlights the important factors to consider when determining how the City's governing arrangements should be configured regarding Corporate Parenting responsibilities and makes recommendations for implementation.
- 1.5 The government have funded National Children's Bureau (NCB) to develop materials, based on best local practice, to support corporate parents to narrow the gap between the outcomes of children looked after and their peers. They advise the materials are used to improve the support provided to children looked after. Information from NCB has therefore been used to inform the recommendations in this report, alongside other national research.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Corporate Parenting Group explores with the Chair of the Council's OSMC how the CPG can fulfil its scrutiny function under the umbrella of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

2. That the structure of meetings includes regular and structured interface and dialogue with the Children in Care Council
3. Subject to discussion with the Chair of OSMC appropriate Terms of Reference are drafted for the Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Committee

3 DETAIL

Background

- 3.1 Edward Timpson, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, wrote to all Lead Members and Directors in June this year reminding them of the importance of having in place strong corporate parenting processes which embed the voice of the child. He stressed the importance of holding regular meetings with local Children in Care Councils (CICC) to discuss how support for children in care can be improved.
- 3.2 The report presented to the last meeting of this Committee in June stated that the key component of an effective Corporate Parenting body is robust challenge and that good Corporate Parents should seek to engage with children looked after on an ongoing basis to ensure services are meeting their needs, making a difference and therefore improving outcomes. The report stated that the benchmark should be 'would it be good enough for my child?'.
 - 3.2.1 In order to take responsibilities towards children looked after seriously, Southampton's Corporate Parenting Committee itself needs to be robust and have absolute clarity about how roles and responsibilities play an integral part in improving outcomes for Southampton's children looked after. It needs to establish and maintain strong links with the City's CICC.
- 3.3 In the recent round of Ofsted inspections of services for looked after children, the effectiveness of corporate parenting groups has been commented upon. Inspectors have stated where the group worked well it provided the leadership necessary to drive an ambitious and coherent multi-agency approach to improving outcomes for looked after children and care-leavers. Where it did not work well, services for looked after children tended to be less effective.
- 3.4 Ofsted identified where looked after services were considered to be good. In these authorities the corporate parenting board:
 - demonstrated a strong cross-party commitment to looked after children, by championing their rights, having high aspirations for their achievement, monitoring children's progress and challenging outcomes;
 - clearly understood its role and the responsibilities of the local authority towards looked after children, and planned for and prioritised their needs, resulting in a greater focus on improving outcomes;
 - actively engaged with their young people, for example through children in care councils that are well-established and have effective and regular links with senior management and elected members.

3.5 There is no absolute prescription for establishing a corporate parenting group. Different models can be equally effective, as long as they are structured in such a way that they can fulfil the functions detailed in paragraph 3.4 above. They can range from formal council committees which are decision making forums, to scrutiny committees, panels or boards, multi-agency partnership forums or hybrid models. There are advantages and disadvantages to each model. For example the advantage of it being a formal council meeting is that it accords a higher status in which decisions are made. However, the disadvantages include the fact that council committees are open to the public, operate according to formal rules, and are therefore less likely to facilitate engagement by children and young people. Hybrid models have the potential to lack clarity regarding status and may also be unclear about how they link with elected members.

3.6 Whatever the model, the key issues to resolve are as follows:

- Who should chair the group
- What should membership be
- What is the status of the group
- What can it decide
- Who should the group report to
- Who should report into the group
- How will the views of children and young people be represented

3.7 An example of good practice regarding corporate parenting arrangements in the London Borough of Lambeth has been highlighted by Ofsted. Lambeth's Corporate Parenting Board monitor and review services to establish the objectives and priorities for looked after children by council departments and partner agencies. Their central role is to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. They have a similar number of children looked after as Southampton and their structure for delivery is as follows:

- The Corporate Parenting Board is chaired by the Lead Member for children and young people and includes five elected members (cross-party membership).
- The board meets five times a year. Each meeting has a themed focus on health, staying safe, education, economic well-being and making a positive contribution.
- The Lead Member meets members of the Children in Care Council prior to each board meeting.
- The Children in Care Council has a standing agenda item at the board and the chair and co-chair of the care council attend the meetings. Young people are confident that their views are taken seriously and lead to change.

Members of the Children in Care Council present the annual Corporate Parenting Board report to full council each year with the support of the Lead Member. All councillors sign the pledge each year at the full council meeting.

3.8 The CICC in Southampton, now supported by Youth Options, is in the early stages of development. Children looked after and care leavers to date have not routinely informed service developments or had the opportunity to really have a voice. The

CICC met for the first time in April this year and a report was presented to the last meeting of this Committee highlighting an initial programme of events. There is clearly a significant way to go to develop the CICC and alongside the leadership of Youth Options in convening meetings and consultation events, there are plans for children looked after and care leavers in Southampton to embark upon a range of national events, supported by Voice and Bristol University. A report will be presented to the next meeting of this Committee outlining this programme, known as Bright Spots.

- 3.9 Over the forthcoming months it is imperative that the City's Corporate Parenting Committee raises its profile and aligns itself very closely to the CICC in order to drive service improvements for children looked after. In addition, and as part of a development programme, it is also important to establish the status of the Committee, alongside governing arrangements which clarify reporting mechanisms feeding into and out of the Committee.
- 3.10 Within Children's Social Care, plans are underway to establish an overarching Children Looked After Strategy Group. The Strategy group will replace a number of existing meetings and comprise senior officers from a range of agencies plus other key stakeholders. It is envisaged that a number of task and finish groups will be commissioned to carry out identified areas of work which will be reported into the strategy group. There clearly needs to be strong links between this strategy group and the Corporate Parenting group.

4 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 Taking into account the key issues identified in paragraphs 3.4 and 3.6 of this report and Lambeth's model highlighted as good practice by Ofsted, there are a number of developments that Southampton could begin to progress in order to ensure that the corporate parenting structure is more robust. These are detailed below.
- 4.2 In order to establish robust governing arrangements, the Corporate Parenting Committee needs to explore, with the Chair of OSMC how it can best perform its scrutiny function under the umbrella of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. Part of the function of Corporate Parents is to monitor the service for children looked after and this can be seen as overlapping with the Council's remit for scrutiny. The links with OSMC will enable CPG to promote vigorous challenge.
- 4.3 The Children Looked After Strategy Group would report to the Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.4 Both of the above forums should focus on key themes for meetings, as is the case in Lambeth. This provides a formal structure for meetings. The five themes around the Every Child Matters outcomes, defined within the Lambeth model, would be an effective means of reporting progress.
- 4.5 Until such time as the CICC becomes well established, the chair of the Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Committee should meet with Youth Options and identified CICC representatives prior to each formal scrutiny meeting to feedback issues around consultation events and other key issues. The themed agendas will also guide the business of the CICC. It is early days and too premature to have a standing item on

the scrutiny meeting agenda, whereby the chair and/or co-chair of the CICC present items, as is the case in Lambeth, but this should be the imminent goal for the City with timescales for implementation from April 2014.

4.6

As discussed at the previous Corporate Parenting Committee, briefing events regarding the role of Corporate Parents will be set up for Members over the forthcoming months and hosted by representatives within Children's Social Care.

5 RESOURCES/JOINT COMMISSIONING IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None at this stage

6 IMPACT ON OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

6.1 Subject to agreement, the proposals will establish a robust Corporate Parenting arrangement whereby the governance arrangements are clear, the links with the CICC will develop and strengthen over time, which in turn, will support a programme leading to improved outcomes for children looked after and care leavers.