

Agenda Item 46.

TITLE	Corporate Parenting Board Review
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 January 2020
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Director of Children's Services - Carol Cammiss

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

This proposal was presented to the Corporate Parenting Board on the 23rd October 2019.

The aim of the proposal was to develop the Corporate Parenting Board and make it more effective, while at the same time increasing the influence and engagement of children in care and care leavers.

RECOMMENDATION

This is for information only for Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

This report was presented to the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) on the 23rd October 2019. The recommendation was for the Board to accept the proposals outlined in the report. The minutes of the meeting on the 23rd October 2019 (please note these are still draft) state that: 'Upon being put to the vote most Members were in favor of the new proposal'

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Corporate Parenting Board previously met every two months. It is administered and run as a committee. The membership includes 10 Cllr's and it is attended on average by 6 Cllr's. A range of reports are presented to the board throughout the year. A number of officers and external agencies are core members, with other agencies attending when required to present reports. Looked after Children and Care leavers attended with their advocate and shared information on topics or their experience of being looked after by Wokingham Borough Council. Their feedback suggested that they did not find attending the CPB of value or child focused.

The aim of the proposal was to develop the role of the board so that it equally focused on:

Overview: Reports, Data understanding of themes and patterns

Engagement: Meeting with looked after children and care leavers, staff and care providers.

Opportunity: Cllr's and officers drawing on their role in the council and community to advocate and promote the needs and develop opportunities for looked after children and care leavers

Outcomes: Development of services, enrichment, attainment and outcomes for children

The proposal was also to reduce the frequency that the formal board sat, change and develop the method and approach of how board members engage and hear from children and young people and establish an operational group that sits below the Board.

The information in this report below is the same as that presented to the CPB on the 23rd October 2019.

Background

The OFSTED ILACS report published in July 2019 listed five areas under the heading '*What needs to Improve*'. One of these was '*The oversight and impact of the corporate parenting board*'.

Point 46 of the OFSTED report states:

While the local authority generally acts as a responsible corporate parent, senior leaders have recognised that the corporate parenting board (CPB) needs to be overhauled. Their aim is to make it more effective, while at the same time increasing the influence and engagement of children in care and care leavers. Currently, the CPB has limited oversight of the work of the virtual school, and its interface with the children in care council is stilted.

The Corporate Parenting Board currently meets every two months. It is administered and run as a committee. Its membership includes 10 Cllr's and it is attended on average by 6 Cllr's. A range of reports are presented to the board throughout the year. A number of officers and external agencies are core members, with other agencies attending when required to present reports. Looked after Children and Care leavers attend with their advocate and share information on topics or their experience of being looked after by Wokingham Borough Council. Their feedback would suggest that they do not find attending the CPB of value or child focused.

The proposal is to develop the role of the board so that it equally focuses on:

Overview: Reports, Data understanding of themes and patterns

Engagement: Meeting with looked after children and care leavers, staff and care providers

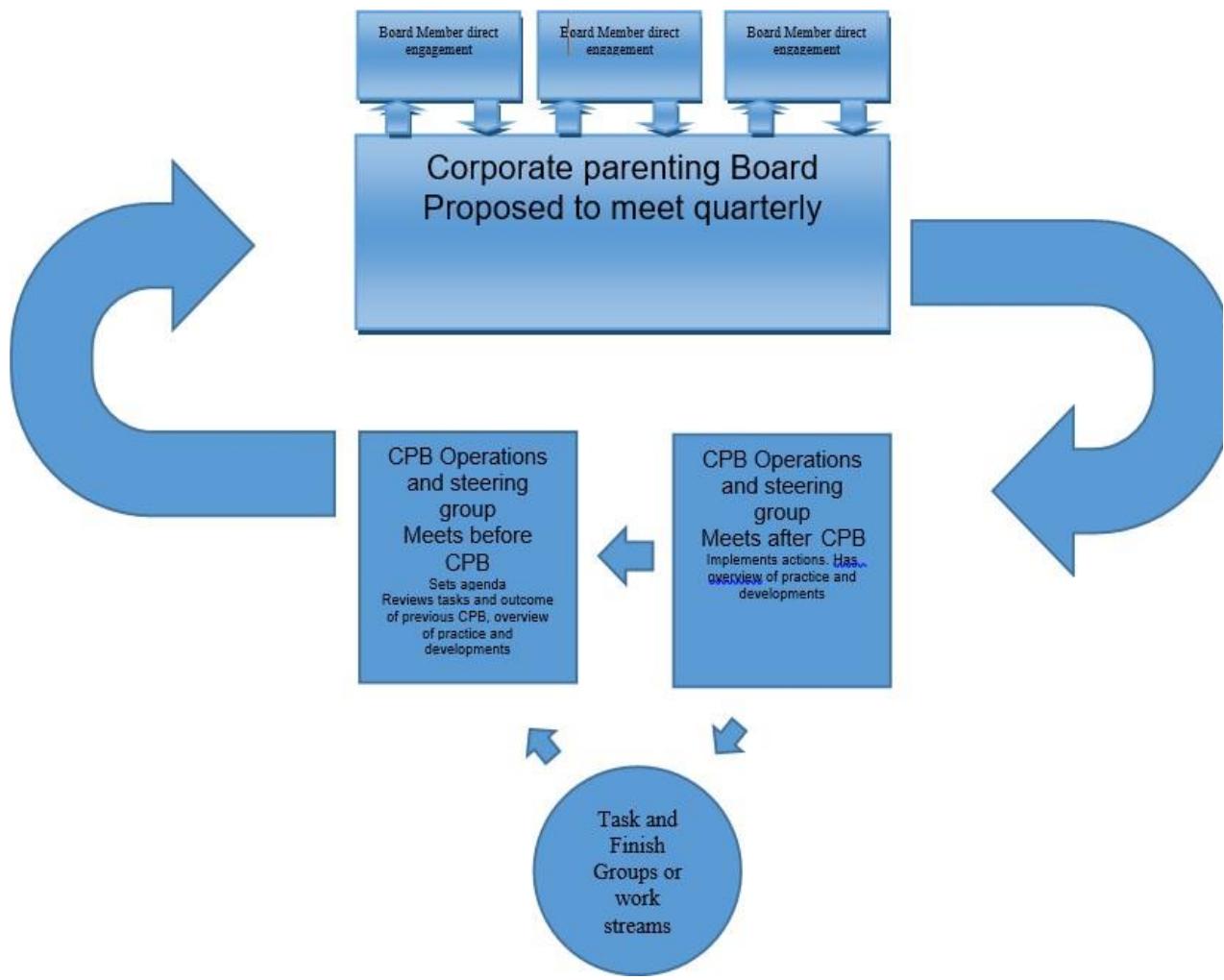
Opportunity: Cllr's and officers drawing on their role in the council and community to advocate and promote the needs and develop opportunities for looked after children and care leavers

Outcomes: Development of services, enrichment, attainment and outcomes for children.

The proposal is also to reduce the frequency that the formal board sits, change and develop the method and approach of how board members engage and hear from children and young people and establish an operational group that sits below the Board.

How would this look:

- The Board would reduce the number of formal meetings to every 3 months.
- A set agenda would be created for Key reports being submitted to the board, with others coming when required.
- The board would scrutinise the reports, identify themes, challenge and celebrate performance and ask relevant questions, of the author and relevant officers.
- A fixed data set would be available for each board giving an overview of key performance indicators.
- After each Board and prior to the next meeting the CPB Operations Group would meet to implement any actions and prepare the agenda for the next meeting. The Operations Group would have an overview and provide governance of all ongoing activity and actions in relation to the 'offer' and service delivery developments in Wokingham and nationally. It would act as the conduit between the Board, operational service delivery and developments.
- Between Board meetings there would be an opportunity for members of the Board to meet and engage directly with looked after children, care leavers (protocol required re setting up and relevant checks being undertaken i.e. DBS), workers and carers in a non-committee setting. This would provide an opportunity to obtain direct feedback and experiences of those in receipt of or who deliver our services. Observations and insight from this direct interface would be fed back at the next meeting. This would create the opportunity for the Board to have a fuller understanding of the services we deliver and lived experience of children and young people, through both direct engagement and also scrutiny and overview of the reports presented.



Analysis of Issues

The aims of these proposals are to:

Ensure that we build into our routine interactions with children and young people, opportunities for them to have a voice, give feedback and make proposals about their experience of being in our care

- Ensure that Board members and officers who deliver corporate parenting responsibilities hear the views of children and young people; engage in a dialogue with them; understand their circumstances and monitor their progress and development
- Provide a clear line of oversight and Governance of our corporate parenting responsibilities, our offer, delivery and developments

This will be done by:

- Ensuring that children views are routinely collected and considered in planning and service development.

- Ensuring that we give children and young people the chance to be part of a group of children in care where they can share and discuss their experiences and aspirations with.
- Ensuring that children in care are represented by a Children in Care Council (CiCC).
- Committing to arranging special consultation and participation events for children in care and young people on specific issues (e.g. health, education and so on).
- Creating opportunities for CPB members to meet directly with looked after children and care leavers, visit placements and meet with teams and individuals who deliver social work and look after children.
- Celebrating the achievements and progress of children and young people in care and care leavers.

Enabling the views of children and young people to be effectively received and responded to, through:

- The creation of a Corporate Parenting Board involving representatives of all sections of the Council and representatives of children in care.
- Ensuring that our Offer is dynamic and nimble to the changing needs of children in care and care leavers.

Purpose of the Board

The Corporate Parenting Board should ensure that all elements of the Council work collectively together to make sure the children in Wokingham's care get the best possible support and service that can be offered. Corporate Parenting requires ownership and leadership at a senior level, including from elected members in the Council.

A DfE guide for Councillors "If this were my Child..." (October 2003) identified the following issues as key to good corporate parenting:

- acceptance of responsibility for children in the Council's care
- making the needs of children and young people in care a priority
- seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.

For both officers and Councillors, being a corporate parent means that when any service is being reviewed that could impact upon looked-after children and care leavers, or when you're hearing feedback from, or reports about, children in the council's care, consider:

“What if this were my child?”
“What can we do to put this right?”

It is important to remember that, just as not all children are the same, looked-after children and care leavers are not one homogenous group. While it is true that some will have experienced trauma and disruption in their lives and need support to cope with those experiences, others will have adjusted well to being in care and may be flourishing. As corporate parents, Councillors need to recognise the uniqueness of the children in their care, and make sure each child is getting what they need to do their best.

Children in care and care leavers have significant and complex needs and are among the most vulnerable children and young people in our society. Yet they have the right to expect the outcomes we want for every child. And that they should:

- be healthy
- be safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution to society
- achieve economic well-being

The outcomes for children in care are, nationally, below those of their peers (in terms of education achievement, employment, mental health involvement, and so on). It is therefore necessary for better monitoring and coordination at a strategic level of the parenting, and other services and support that children in care receive.

2. BACKGROUND

The term Corporate Parenting is used to describe the Council and its partners' duties and responsibilities to children and young people who are in care. Its central principle is that the Local Authority and partners should parent children in care much as one would parent their own child or children in their own family. So as corporate parents we perform a parenting role for all our children in care and as, former secretary of state, Frank Dobson said when he was the minister responsible for this area: 'we should have no less aspirations for children in care than we have for our own children'.

These views were reiterated in the *Care Matters: Time for Change* White Paper 2007:

“Improving the role of the corporate parent is key to improving the outcomes for children in care.... A good corporate parent must offer everything that a good parent would, including stability. It must address both the difficulties which children in care experience and the challenges of parenting within a complex system of different services. Equally it is important that children

have a chance to shape and influence the parenting they receive.”
(P7)

We therefore need to take the best features of birth parenting and seek to apply them to the more complicated and varied area of corporate parenting.

The best features of parenting include parents who:

- love and enjoy their children, celebrate their achievements and - be their advocate
- take an active interest in their children, their progress and their development and know how well they are doing. They promote good health, and educational achievements and support them to become successful adults.
- seek out development opportunities for them be that in leisure, the arts, sports, or employment opportunities
- provide additional support for their children so they can maximise educational and social opportunities
- engage in a dialogue with children to ensure that they know their views and how they are experiencing their education and other development opportunities; they take those views into consideration, but they retain the final say, until age appropriate decisions can be left with the young person.
- use that dialogue to actively influence children and young people, to boost their confidence, to let them know they are special and important to them, to encourage them to set goals
- let children know the realities and limits of what they as parents can do and provide for them

We need to apply these features to the parenting role and responsibilities we have for children in care.

A key challenge for us as corporate parents is to involve, and consult with children and young people and give them a real voice in the process of developing and delivering the range of support and services they need to achieve good outcomes.

While parents perform these actions naturally through the day-to-day interactions they have with their children (perhaps over the breakfast table or when their children returned from school etc), as corporate parents we need to identify and create ways in which corporate parents can interact with children and young

people, hear their views, have an influence on them and reflect on what steps we can take to improve their development opportunities.

The corporate parenting principles set out seven areas that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

As corporate parents, it is every Councillor's responsibility to make sure that the council is meeting these duties towards children in care and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Board can undertake this through:

- staying informed about children in the council's care, and care leavers
- provide a useful forum for regular, detailed discussion of issues,
- Develop positive link with children in care forums

Members of the Corporate Parenting Board can also use their position to raise awareness of the role amongst colleagues, and provide support to the lead member for children's services

The corporate parenting Board does not replace the duty of all Councillors; members of all committees have a responsibility to consider how reports before them impact upon children in care and care leavers. Receive regular progress reports with regard to looked-after children and care leavers, Review Data to have an overview of medium-to-long-term trends.

There are certain risks that particularly affect children in care and care leavers that corporate parents need to be aware of for example missing, and exploitation.

3. STAKEHOLDERS

Corporate parenting is not just the responsibility of the children's services department it is a whole Council responsibility. Because parenting involves every aspect of a child's life it is essential that the Council's corporate parenting board representatives reflect all relevant services. The key stakeholders responsible for delivering corporate parenting include social workers, those from education, health, CAMHS, housing, and other departments who may not have a frontline role but offer leisure, housing, and employment opportunities.

Children in care are key stakeholders of the Corporate Parenting Board.

- At any one time there are around 117 children in care.
- During one calendar year up to 400 will have been looked after
- Ages range from birth to 18 years old
- Children come into care because of different reasons: abuse or neglect; family dysfunction; family stress; absent parenting; child's disability; child beyond parental control
- Children have diverse needs. Some have special education need or disability; some are involved with the justice system; some have experienced serious trauma; some are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- Some children live in foster homes, children's homes, residential homes, and semi-independent accommodation. Some placed for adoption and live with prospective adopters

Our challenge is to find ways of ensuring that all sections of this diverse group are able to participate and have their voice heard by corporate parenting representatives.

Other important stakeholders are those who work closely with children in care. These include:

- Foster carers - most children in care are placed with foster carers.
- Independent Reviewing Officers. The plans for children in care are reviewed by Independent Reviewing Officers who have an important role for children in care and have a statutory responsibility to ensure that their views are obtained and taken into account.

- Social workers and their managers. The social workers for children in care have a crucial role in how well children in care do and how we care for them.
- Virtual school; accommodation providers and key workers

4. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENT

The Corporate Parenting Board will comprise of key stakeholders for delivering care and support to children in care alongside elected members

5. CORPORATE PARENTING IN ACTION

The Corporate Parenting Board will monitor and scrutinise services and progress of children in care and care leavers; and will routinely receive information relating to:

- How children in care and care leavers are doing
- Views of children in care and care leavers
- How services and outcomes for children in care and care leavers can be improved

To do this the Corporate Parenting Board will need:

- statistical data set which shows, numbers, progress and outcomes for children in care and care leavers
- the views of children and young people
- the views and impact of key stakeholders

A list of regular reports to the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) will need to be agreed, but should cover the health and education of children in care, placement and housing issues, and other issues.

There will be presentations to the CPB on specific issues as required, and discussion of focused issues following each participation event.

7. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The views of children and young people will need to be collected:

- routinely at their reviews and in meetings with their social workers.
- through the children in care groups and the Children in Care Council.

- through special events that encourage participation of children in care and care leavers. Feedback gathered at these events would be fed back to the Corporate Parenting Board.
- CPB members meeting and visiting Looked after children and care leavers (DBS checks will be required)

The objectives of the board will be:

- to routinely examine and challenge performance relating to children in care and inquire into those areas where performance is poor or of concern
- to explore the extent to which the Council is contributing to meeting the needs of children in care and care leavers
- ensure that the strategic plans for children in care and care leavers are being effectively delivered
- identify and celebrate the achievements of individual children in care and care leavers
- meet and listen to children and care leavers in their context or environment. Respond to what they or their representatives (on the board) say about their experiences of being in care and the kinds of services they want
- be a champion for children in care and care leavers in the Council using the standard: “**is this good enough for my child?**” to challenge and scrutinise services provided by the Council and partners
- ensure national initiatives in relation to children in care and care leavers are disseminated and embedded in practice.
- ensure those planning, delivering, and monitoring services have taken account of diversity and equality issues affecting children in care and care leavers.
- monitor the implementation of agreed actions, in particular actions taken in response to the views of children and young people

This will be done by:

- listening to the feedback from children and young people and making proposals for action within the Council to improve services to children in care and care leavers
- monitoring progress and development of children and young people in key areas such as education, health, accommodation, and employment opportunities by using regular management

information

- making recommendations to the Council on ways of improving development opportunities for children and young people, and the quality of care offered to children in care and care leavers in Wokingham.

PARTICIPATION AND OBTAINING THE VIEWS OF

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)			
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

Public Sector Equality Duty

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

List of Background Papers

Contact Adam Davis	Service Social Care and Early Help
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