

13th January 2015

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Update on the activity and operation of the Corporate Parenting Board

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr B. Cassidy (Cabinet Member: Children and Young People)

Executive Summary:

This report sets out the purpose and activity of the Corporate Parenting Board, with particular reference to the improvements that have been made to it recently. These improvements will increase the Board's impact on outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

Reason for scrutiny:

Scrutiny Panel members requested this report as part of their routine monitoring of key partnership activity in respect of children and young people. The timing of this report may have been slightly delayed by the change of Lead Member and the appointment of the new Director of Children's Services, but with those changes have come developments for the Board which are covered in this report.

Recommendation:

That the report be received and approved.

Background papers:

The report contains two appendices:

- A list of the Board's membership
- The Walsall Looked After Children's Strategy 2014-17

Reference is also made to the Council's Sufficiency Strategy, which is not appended but copies can be provided on request.

Resource and legal considerations:

No additional resources are required at this time and there are no specific legal considerations.

Citizen impact:

Looked After Children are perhaps the Council's most special and important citizens because of its corporate parenting responsibilities to them. The report describes how we intend to ensure that outcomes for each of these special citizens are maximised.

Environmental impact:

None

Performance management:

The Corporate Parenting Board routinely receives performance management information in respect of looked after children and care leavers. The changes reported here will enable the Board to better monitor progress in achieving the aims of the Looked After Children's Strategy. This report does not contain any such performance data or analysis at this time.

Equality Implications:

Levels of need for social care intervention generally – and specifically the need for children to become looked after – correlate with poverty and disadvantage. However, this report has no specific equalities implications.

Consultation:

This report describes a Board which operates on the basis of consultation with partners and especially with children and young people themselves. Indeed one of the Task Groups described in the report has a specific remit for such "respect and involvement". There has been no need for specific consultation about this report.

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1. Background

- 1.1 'Corporate Parenting' refers to the collective responsibility of the Council, elected members, employees and partner agencies, to provide the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are (or have recently been) looked after by the Local Authority. A child in the care of the Council looks to the whole Council to be the best parent it can be to that child. Every member and employee of the Council has the statutory responsibility to act for that child in the same way that a good parent would act for their child.
- 1.2 Every good parent wants the best for their child, to see their child flourish with good health, to be safe and happy, to do well at school and to enjoy good relationships with their peers. They want them to make the most of leisure opportunities, hobbies and interests, and to grow towards adulthood equipped to lead independent lives and to make their way as adults in higher education, in good careers and jobs and become financially secure.
- 1.3 The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) brings together elected members and officers of the Council, with key multi-agency partners to monitor and plan services to ensure that the Council fulfils its responsibilities and duties to looked after children in the best possible way. A full list of the Board's membership is provided at appendix 1.
- 1.4 The Council has a Looked After Children's (LAC) Strategy which sets out its promises, priorities, targets and expectations and the actions needed if those are to be achieved. The CPB approves the Strategy and then monitors and drives the work programme that it contains. The current Strategy is attached as appendix 2. That Strategy is itself supported by a Sufficiency Strategy which underpins our work to ensure that there are enough of the right high quality placements to provide each looked after child with arrangements that best meet their needs.
- 1.5 Each meeting of the Board receives a performance report containing the key statistical information about looked after children. Some of the content will be as is contained in performance reports that are made to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel. Another standing item is a report on activity related to engaging with young people, in particular through the Council4Kids (C4K) meetings.

2. Recent Changes to the Operation of the Board

- 2.1 The meeting of the CPB in October 2014 was the first to be chaired by Councillor Cassidy as Lead Member for Children's Services. It was also the first since the recent appointment of David Haley as Director of Children's Services. It therefore provided an opportunity to take stock of the operation of the Board. That review recognised that the work of the Board in making a reality of the LAC Strategy could not be truly effective without some dedicated action and activity between the Board's bi-monthly meetings.
- 2.2 The Board therefore resolved to establish a number of Task Groups, each with direct responsibility for a section of the Strategy. In addition to the membership of

each being suited to its area of interest and action, the Board decided that every group should include Elected Member representation and an advocate for the voice of looked after children and young people. The inclusion of an elected member is important in achieving our desire to broaden and increase the active involvement of Councillors as corporate parents (which was also demonstrated by the Scrutiny Panel's recent decision for Members to visit children's residential units). The voice of the child is vital in being the real driving force for what we do by ensuring that we directly address the hopes, fears and opinions of children and young people.

2.3 The Task Groups have the following titles and areas of responsibility (reflecting the relevant section of the LAC Strategy):

- Respect and Involvement
- Home
- Education
- Health
- Leisure
- Moving to Adulthood

2.4 At its December 2014 meeting, the CPB received a report back from the appointed chair of each group on its progress in establishing its membership, meeting structures and its plans for addressing the issues allocated to it. Most of the groups are up and running and an elected member is being sought for each. Where there were delays in establishing the groups and developing the plan for action, these were understandable; for example, the Education group is to be led by the new Head of the Virtual School, Balwant Bains, who had only very recently taken up his post.

2.5 From its meeting in February 2015 onwards the CPB will receive a report from each group that will rate its progress against its action plan items; red, amber or green. This will enable the Board to focus properly on successes and issues that have not met their targets. The Board firmly believes that this approach will drive real improvement in what is provided for looked after children, and thereby the outcomes for those children.

2.6 At the December meeting the CPB also discussed how best to engage all 60 Elected Members in discharging their duties as corporate parents. The view was that a good first step would be to make "Total Respect" training available to all elected members early in 2015. This is delivered by young people and is always well received by those who attend. Plans are also being put in place to deliver other seminars to Members, notably on the subject of Child Sexual Exploitation.

3. Recommendation

3.1 That the Scrutiny Panel receives and approves this report.

Appendix 1
Corporate Parenting Board
Attendees List

Councillor Barbara Cassidy, Portfolio Holder, Children's Services (Chair)

David Haley, Executive Director, Children's Services

Tony Griffin, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services

Kate Woodman, Active Involvement Coordinator, IYPSS

Carol Boughton, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Children's Services

Ian Cruise-Taylor, Delivery Manager, IYPSS

Debbie Silvester, Operations Manager, Children's Services

Kevin Newton, Chair Person, Foster Carers Association

Mandy Viggers, Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children, Walsall Clinical Commissioning Group

Liz Day, Independent Reviewing Officer, Children's Services

Councillor Keith Chambers, Labour Party Member Champion

Maria Hadley, Health Co-ordinator for Looked After Children, Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust

Alison Glover, Group Manager – Looked After Children and Care Leavers, Children's Services

Councillor Doreen Shires, Liberal Democrats Member Champion

Julie Mayo, School Links Manager, Walsall College

Paul Wicker, Principal Sport & Active Recreation Officer, Neighbourhood Services

Karen Marcroft, Head of Performance and QA, Children's Services

Julie Jones, Housing Manager, Resources Directorate

Bal Bains, Head of Virtual School, Children's Services