

Corporate Parenting Board

15 April 2019

**Agenda
Item No. 4**

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

Report:

The terms of reference for the Corporate Parenting Board state that an Annual Report shall be produced for submission to Council.

The draft annual report is appended to this report for the Boards consideration.

Recommendations:

That the Corporate Parenting Board comment on and approve the annual report for submission to Council.

Contact Officer:

Neil Picken
Senior Democratic Services Officer
 01922 654369
 Neil.picken@Walsall.gov.uk

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2018 – 2019



Walsall Council



Foreword

I am proud to introduce the first annual report of the Corporate Parenting Board since being established as a Committee of the Council in May, 2018. During the last year the Board has been mindful of the Ofsted inspection undertaken in September, 2017 and worked hard to:

- Listen to and connect with young people;
- Deliver change rather than just talk about it;
- Be an advocate for young people nationally;
- Constructively challenge officers and partners putting the best interests of children and young people first.

The body of the report provides further detail on issues considered by the Board over the last year including subsidising council tax for care leavers out of borough, health provision for looked after children and the draft local offer. However, I would like to highlight from the outset that the Board is committed to initiate and develop a relationship with young people. Hearing directly from them is an absolute must to ensure that we, as corporate parents, are shaping and influencing services in the right way and at the right time. To develop relationships members of the Board have attended numerous events throughout the year and attendance at the Board by young people is encouraged, welcomed and valued. With this in mind, I leave the rest of my foreword to care leaver Suria Pal who was invited to contribute to the annual report and participated in a Board meeting in January, 2019:-

“I would like to say thank you for giving me a chance to be there [the Board] to take part in something so big. The opportunity to say something about my experience and also to keep improving our service, and do our best is really appreciated.

My experience of the Board was that everyone was very welcoming and easy to talk to and understanding. The Board made it very easy for me to open up and talk to you all about my experience which have been both positive and negative. Most importantly I felt listened to and feel that you are going to take my views forward to make change for other young people who are now in care.”



Councillor Tim Wilson
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board

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The Corporate Parenting Board

The purpose of the Board is to assist the Council fulfil its legal obligations and responsibilities towards children looked after and leaving care by providing strategic direction to ensure they are effectively supported to reach their potential.

The Board convenes seven times a year and comprises seven councillors (shown below) together with an advisor from the Health Service/Clinical Commissioning Group. The advisor provides a crucial contribution and expertise, in relation to health matters, which are important to the lives of all young people in care/care leavers. Young people are encouraged to attend and contribute to all meetings. Other attendees include the Executive Director (Children's Services), Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) and the Children and Young Peoples Champion together with officers from children's services and other directorates whom attend when requested to discuss key issues.



Councillor Wilson
Chair of the Board



Councillor Jukes
Vice Chair



Councillor Ferguson



Councillor Neville



Councillor M. Nazir



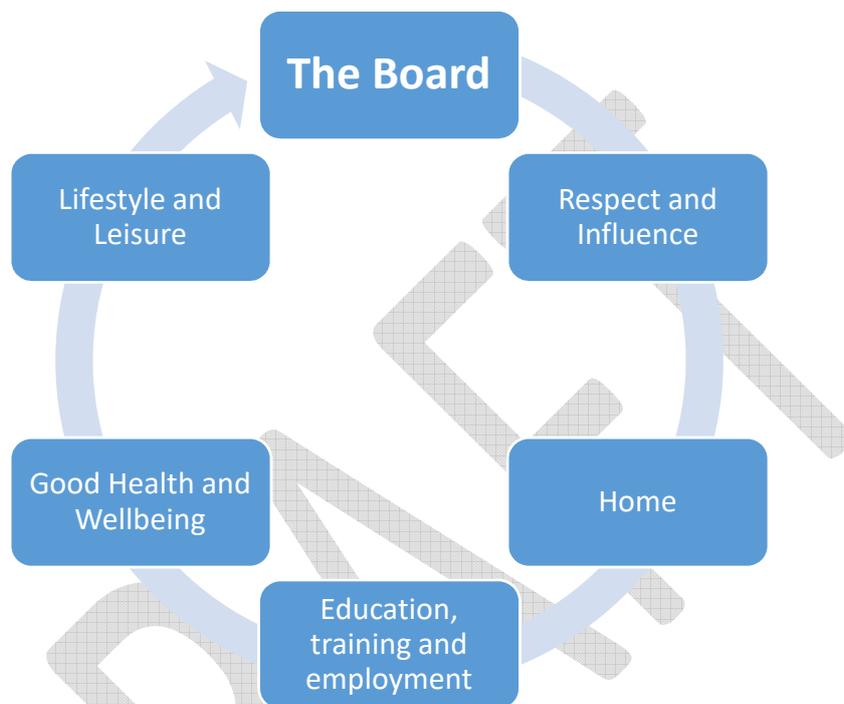
Councillor Nawaz



Councillor Kudhail

Structure

The Board provides strategic direction, shaping the services young people in care and care leavers receive. This includes monitoring and evaluating the progress of five work streams which are delivered through a multi-agency, Officer level, 'Operational – Corporate Parenting Steering Group'. The work streams each contribute to the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017 to 2020. The work streams are:



Ofsted

In September 2017, Ofsted inspected services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. Arising from the inspection, Ofsted commented that work was required to improve the functioning of the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure that their work has a positive impact on improving services for children and the outcomes that they achieve.

In May 2018 a full review of the role and function of the Corporate Parenting Board was undertaken which resulted in the Board becoming a formally constituted meeting of the Council with revised membership and terms of reference. In September that year, Ofsted undertook a focussed visit. In a letter that followed, Ofsted confirmed that:-

“The local authority has recognised the need to strengthen corporate parenting arrangements, in order to ensure greater scrutiny and challenge of, as well as greater focus on, the experience and outcomes for children in care and care leavers. Pace has increased, with the lead member chairing the board. Sub group activity is helping to drive progress across its appropriate thematic priorities, and the positive appointment of a children’s champion is of additional benefit”.

Work Programme 2018/19

The Board has considered a number of matters during the 2018/19 municipal year. All reports and associated minutes are available to view on the council's website. Items considered have included:-

- Young People Engagement
- The Mockingbird Fostering Programme
- The Draft Local Offer
- Scrutiny of the five operational work streams
- Performance Monitoring
- The Regional Adoption Agency
- The Fostering and Adoption Annual Reports
- Health Update
- Performance of the Virtual School
- Ofsted Inspection

Key Areas of Development

Young People Engagement

The Board is passionate and strived to improve engagement with young people during its first year of operation. This coincided with the employment of a Children and Young Persons Champion (Participation and Engagement) in May 2018 which has greatly assisted the Board. The, highly regarded, post holder provides a valuable link between the Board and Young People and has been instrumental in re-establishing the Children in Care Council (CiCC) which provides further opportunity for engagement. The Board were fortunate to be invited to a CiCC meeting at 'Myplace' on 12th March 2019. Representatives of the Board hope to attend CiCC bi-annually in future years on dates prescribed by the CiCC.

Whilst the CiCC continues to develop, the Board required an interim solution to ensure that they were hearing the voices of young people. This came in the form of a standing item on each agenda entitled 'young people engagement'. This provided an opportunity for the Young Persons Champion to update the Board on issues young people had raised and update on matters previously discussed. This has been effective. Through this mechanism, the Board has considered various issues raised by young people such as:-

- Apprenticeships and work experience for young people with disabilities;
- Supporting care leavers into employment and training when they have a conviction;
- The provision of a 'drop in' specifically for benefits advice and guidance;
- Young people's wish for all professionals/members to attend 'The Total Respect Programme';
- Improving Housing Associations understanding of 'life as a care leaver';

- Care Leavers feeling alone and isolated when approaching adulthood and moving into independence;
- Council Tax for care leavers moving out of the borough;
- Out of Hours support to Care Leavers;
- Young people would like a budget to participate in new experiences to enhance self-esteem and confidence.

In January 2019, a number of young people attended the Board and provided valuable insight into the way in which council service provision and delivery impacts upon a young person's experience of life in care/a care leaver. The Board would like to thank those young people for taking the time to share their experiences and welcome them and others to attend meetings during the 2019/20 municipal year.

Perhaps one of the best ways to develop relationships and breakdown barriers is through attending events away from a formal setting. Board members have embraced the opportunity to do so and have attended a number of occasions including the Christmas meal, an awards ceremony and the foster care association annual dinner. It is essential that Members of the Board continue to engage with young people as any parent would with their children.

The Board's commitment to engage with young people is formally set out within the 'The Local Offer' which outlines what the Council offers to our young people when they are Leaving Care. At the request of the Board, this now states that care leavers and children in care are encouraged to attend and contribute to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Council Tax for Care Leavers Living Out of Borough

The UK Government Strategy 'Keep on Caring' recommends that local authorities consider discounts and exemptions from council tax for care leavers as a way of providing financial support and assisting them with establishing stability in their home lives.

In 2018, Scotland passed legislation to exempt care leavers from paying council tax, followed by Wales in April 2019. In England, whilst local authorities may choose to apply an exemption it is not a statutory obligation. Walsall applies exemptions for care leavers but only for those that live within the Borough. The Board believes that this should be re-considered and is exploring the options to extend support for Council Tax payments for our care leavers living outside the borough and intend to submit a report to Cabinet in the 2019/20 municipal year with recommendations.

In addition, with the models in Scotland and Wales in mind, the Chair of the Board wrote on the Board's behalf to Members of Parliament representing the Walsall constituencies and the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority to push for legislative change and ensure that all care leavers in England receive a consistent level of support. This dialogue continues and the Board will continue to push for this at the highest level of decision-making.

Improving Awareness of Member's role as Corporate Parents

The Board has directed that the Member Induction Booklet and associated training include reference to Members role as corporate parents. In addition, the Chairman personally invited all members to attend Total Respect training which is a national award winning training course developed by the Children's Rights Officers and Advocates (CROA) and delivered by care experienced young trainers.

The Board are keen to increase the numbers of Members attending the course in the 2019/20 municipal year.

Benefits Drop In Service

At its meeting in September 2018, the Board were advised, via the young people engagement report, that whilst there were a number of ways young people could access advice, they still expressed a need for a dedicated drop in service at 'The Hub'. Whilst the service area supported improvements to services, it was not clear whether there would be sufficient footfall to transfer an officer from the Civic Centre to 'The Hub'.

The Board appreciated the view of the service area but recommended that a pilot drop in service be provided at 'The Hub' in order to gauge demand. This was duly undertaken and an update on the outcome of the pilot service will be reported to the Board in the 2019/20 municipal year.

Looking Forward to 2019/20

In 2019/20 the Board will continue to deliver its remit and in particular:-

- Build relationships with young people in care and care leavers and be an advocate for them;
- Challenge services and partners to ensure that young people are receiving the best services and given every opportunity to succeed;
- Lobby central government to push for legislation to secure council tax exemption for all care leavers across England;
- Monitor and contribute to the development and delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

Membership

7 Members of the authority as determined by the Council to include:-

- The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Chair);
- The Chair of Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Note: A representative from the NHS shall be invited to each meeting as an advisor.

Substitution

Substitute members may be nominated to the Committee in accordance with paragraph 4 of the Council procedure rules (Part 4), subject to them having undertaken the relevant training as detailed below.

Chairman and Vice Chairman

The Chairman shall be the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services.

The Vice-Chairman will be appointed at the Annual Council meeting for the municipal year.

Quorum

The quorum of the Board shall be one third of the membership, subject to a minimum of two.

Meetings

The Board will meet every eight weeks or thereabouts and will usually meet at the Council House, Walsall at 6.00 p.m.

Access to information

The Board will comply with the Access to Information Rules set out in Part 4 of the Constitution.

Purpose

To assist the Council fulfil its legal obligations and responsibilities towards children looked after and leaving care by providing strategic direction to ensure they are effectively supported to reach their potential.

Remit

Members of the Corporate Parenting Board shall:

- (1) Provide clear strategic direction in relation to corporate parenting to improve the outcomes and life chances of looked after children and care leavers.
- (2) Ensure that Walsall Council and Partner agencies have a joint commitment to corporate parenting in order to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for our children and young people in care and care leavers.
- (3) Make a demonstrable commitment to prioritising the needs of looked after children and young people.
- (4) Set objectives for monitoring the work of and evaluating the progress of the Officer level 'Operational – Corporate Parenting Steering Group'.
- (5) Develop and sustain clear linkages with Children in Care Council, 'Council 4 Kids', Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board, Walsall Foster Care Association and Partners to include the Police, the NHS and education providers and others.
- (6) Approve a work plan with clear aims and objectives which reflect the terms of Walsall's Corporate Parenting pledge.
- (7) Monitor progress on outcomes and performance indicators for looked after children.
- (8) Submit reports to the Council, the Executive, Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee or such other body as the Board considers appropriate or necessary.
- (9) Submit an annual report to Council in April each year.
- (10) Listen to, consult with and involve looked after children and care leavers and their carer's in the assessment, development and delivery of services, including inviting them to act as advisers to the Committee on a regular basis.
- (11) Develop knowledge and be aware of the experiences and concerns of looked after children and care leavers.
- (12) Promote achievement and acknowledge the aspirations of children and young people and show ambitions and aspirations for all looked after children and care leavers.
- (13) Champion the provision of Council based work placements and apprenticeships for looked after young people.
- (14) Monitor the effectiveness of the Virtual school.