

**CHILDRENS SERVICES AND LIFELONG LEARNING  
SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

**Agenda  
Item No.**

**DATE: 20<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2005**

**7**

**CORPORATE PARENTING – MEMBERS VISITS TO CHILDREN’S HOMES**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr E Hughes - Children’s Services

**Summary of report:**

- This report gives a brief overview of the proposal to review the arrangements for members visits to children’s homes and highlights the key areas for Members consideration.

**Background papers:**

- Children Act 2004 (Every Child Matters)
- Children’s Services Plan
- Equalities plan (in construction)
- Multi-agency disability plan
- Corporate Parenting Strategy Action Plan 2004-6

**Reason for scrutiny:**

- For Members to consider the key areas essential for successful engagement of children and young people in relation to member visits to children’s homes and agree a remit and training and awareness programme that will support the arrangements for visits.

**Signed:**



**Assistant Director: Pauline Pilkington**

**Date:** 20 October 2005

**Resource and legal considerations:**

- Elected members who have not otherwise completed an enhanced CRB check will need to have confirmed clearances before visits can be undertaken

**Citizen impact:**

- Children will benefit from members commitment to ensuring their wellbeing and contributing to improved outcomes in line with the Children Act 2004.

**Environmental impact:**

- None directly associated with this report.

**Performance management:**

- Robust performance scrutiny will contribute to improvement in children's services and will be an essential component of the council's performance management framework.

**Equality Implications:**

- Improvements in member engagement will promote social inclusion and increase the active engagement of children and young people as citizens

**Consultation:**

- Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership
- All strategic managers in education, health and social care
- Headteacher Groups
- Youth Forum
- Parents/Carers forum

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## **1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The report gives a brief overview of the purpose of members' visits to children's homes and highlights key areas for consideration in preparing for engaging with children.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Social Care Services Committees in 2003 and Cabinet in 2005 have considered the promotion of engagement of elected members with children who are looked after in residential and foster care to strengthen the Council's corporate pledge towards looked after children.

- 2.2 The scrutiny process placed a particular emphasis on the responsibility for children looked after by the local authority which resulted in specific work been commissioned to facilitate members visit's to council run children homes.

- 2.3 Officers from Social Care Children's Resource Service provided a briefing workshop to a team of four councillors who had volunteered to undertake visits to children's homes on a regular basis.

- 2.4 The aim of the proposed visits was for members to provide an overview of arrangements particularly in areas such safe care, educational attainment, equality of opportunity and the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

- 2.5 The objective of the visits was for members to act as a champion for looked after children in residential childcare settings by helping to overcome any organisational barriers which prohibited the achievement of improved life outcomes for children.

- 2.6 The workshop highlighted and covered the following areas

- the added disadvantages, chaotic lifestyles and attachment difficulties that looked after children often experience if not provided with stable care
- the spectrum of child abuse and how it impacts and manifests itself on children and young people's levels of vulnerability, risk and understanding
- appropriate nurturing approaches
- ethical considerations

- 2.7 The original membership of the member group included the portfolio holder, Cllr John Rochelle, Cllr Joan Barton and Cllr Val Woodruff.

Senior management representation from Social Care and Supported Housing

- 2.8 Preparations for visits included designing a recording tool, producing a member profile for young people and confirmation of an agreed officer and member communication strategy.

- 2.9 Following a number of visits and which produced some very successful outcomes it has been difficult to maintain momentum as progress has been hampered by the change in scrutiny role in relation to social care, health and

children's services establishing separate performance and scrutiny panels with varying membership.

### **3. Re-establishing member engagement**

- 3.1 The progress report presented to cabinet on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 2005 on the corporate parenting strategy included the recommendation that a report reviewing the role of elected members undertaking children's residential visits to be taken to the children's scrutiny and performance panel.
- 3.2 The outcomes framework published with the Government Green Paper 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' can be used as the key indicator in identifying where corporate parenting needs to be improved for children and young people in the borough i.e. to promote children's ability to
- be healthy
  - stay safe
  - enjoy and achieve
  - make a positive contribution
  - achieve economic well-being
- 3.3 In order to achieve these outcomes it is necessary to identify and evaluate organisations, services and issues which can aid the satisfactory delivery of each outcome.
- 3.4 The intention of member visits to children's homes is to promote the local authority's role as corporate parent as described in the corporate pledge. The new agenda for children and young people will require local authorities to exercise a holistic approach to the needs of every child which means scrutinising all services provided by the council that have an impact on children and young people.
- 3.5 It is possible to group and highlight issues which have a significant impact on the Borough through an analysis of performance and through consultation processes.
- 3.6 Consultations with officers have highlighted the following issues as the most pressing not already being addressed by Scrutiny:

#### Multi-agency working

The green paper *Every Child Matters* published in September 2003 laid out the Government's vision for the integration of key services in a single child-focused organisation. Visits by members to children homes would help secure improved outcomes for looked after children by services by monitoring working together arrangements at the front line to meet the needs of children, young people and their families.

The Children Act 2004 created the statutory basis for this vision to be made reality, and *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*, published in December 2004, set out details of the necessary changes which include member responsibilities towards looked after children.

The 'Lost in Care' Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into the abuse of children in care in the former county council areas of Gwynedd and Clwyd since 1974 (February 2000) recommended that **rota visits by elected members**, as a key indicator of compliance with safeguards for children looked after which should be developed.

Recent research about the benefits of multi-agency working highlights the following areas of benefits:

- Improving outcomes for children and families
- Benefits for staff and services
- Providing what children, young people and families say they want

#### Behaviour Management

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) is the term given to a number of unacceptable behaviours for which a small minority of people are responsible, which adversely affect the quality of life of residents in our communities. Problems include; graffiti, littering and youth nuisance.

Looked after children are often highlighted as potential perpetrators of ASB regardless of supportive evidence and in a manner that does not take fully take into account their vulnerabilities as victims. Standard 22.14 of the National minimum standards for Children's Homes (2002), states children should be encouraged to develop a proper awareness of their rights and responsibilities in relation to those who live in the home, those who work there and people in the community.

In addition to advocating for acceptable levels of services for children and young people; member visits to children's Homes could also help balance the experience and views of children looked after with the views and sometimes inaccurate perspectives of sections of the community. This approach would also recognise that early intervention strategies are vital in order to effectively tackle the issue.

#### Consultation with the Young

The Government strongly supports the effective involvement of children, young people and their families or carers in the development and running of all children's services. Standard 8, consultation with children, from the National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes (2002) captures this in a children home setting by the outcome statement advising that children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the home is run. Members visits to children's home would demonstrate acceptance of the principle of children's involvement is being turned into practice. This would be

meaningful for children and young people and prove effective in bringing about change which becomes embedded within the ethos of the home.

#### **4. Recommendations**

4.1 That the Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny and Performance Panel:

- a) Receive the information regarding the member visit to Children's Home agenda.
- b) Re-establish the member visits to children's home for the municipal year 2005/6.
- c) Set a work programme of review of arrangements for member visits to children's homes including consultation, training, identification of members and arrangements for visits and recording
- d) Consider a timetable of visits which can be agreed and communicated to each home