

Corporate Parenting Board

4th September 2023

Future Governance of Corporate Parenting Board

Executive Summary

This is an updating report requested following the Corporate Parenting Board meeting held on the 3rd July 2023. At that meeting a discussion was held regarding the future governance and facilitation arrangements that had been considered by members.

The report contains options for different models of operating the Board as well as information on practice elsewhere.

Recommendations

1. That the Corporate Parenting Board remains a committee meeting. Reports, minutes and the meeting will remain in public and/or private depending on the sensitivities and/or participants for each meeting. As outlined in option 1 below.
2. That the arrangements are reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Board in 12 months time.

Resource and legal considerations

Local authority duties to young people and care leavers are set out in the following legislation:

Children Act 1989

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

Children and Social Work Act 2017

Walsall is committed to ensuring that children and young people are involved in decision making and processes that directly affect their lives through. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced seven Corporate Parenting Principles and 2 of the principles focus on the involvement and participation of children and young people:

- Encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- Take account of a child or young person's views, wishes and feelings

Article 12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child says that children and young people have the human right to have opinions and for these opinions to be heard.

The Corporate Parenting Board is a formal Committee established by Council. This requires it to work within Committee legislation such as the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended).

Performance management

Corporate Parenting Board ensures everyone works together to fulfil the corporate parenting role and to hold each other to account for making this happen. Regular reports are provided to the Director of Children's Services and the Corporate Parenting Board.

Reducing inequalities

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the response to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and families. By being effective Corporate Parents for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, we collectively seek to redress the disadvantage that looked after children and care leavers face.

Introduction and background

Ensuring that children and young people in care are well looked after and protected is one of the most important jobs that councils do when a child, for whatever reason, can't safely stay at home. The Council's duties as Corporate Parents are critical to its role in order to ensure that all facets of that child's life are provided for and that the Council aims to be aspirational for all of those both in and whom have left care.

The Corporate Parenting Board has been in place as a formal committee meeting since 2017 and in that time has overseen implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the associated Action Plan. It has since been discussed at the Board meeting on the 4th April 2023 and in a subsequent Corporate Parenting Board focus group, about how to develop the function of the Board further, particularly in regards to how it can increase the attendance and participation of the children and young people themselves. When young people do attend and share their experiences, the sensitivity of matters to be discussed at Corporate Parenting Board are not always suitable to be in the public domain and so some young people may not be able to speak freely about themselves in order to assist in improving on future service delivery. The layout of the committee room with microphones, is also felt to be a barrier to the engagement of young people in meetings.

A report on this was presented at both the 4th April 2023 meeting and again on the 3rd July 2023 to discuss the proposed arrangements. During the later meeting, elected members felt that they needed further information and so support for the changes outlined was not provided at that time.

Update

Although current board arrangements function well, there is a will to expand the participation of children and young people further in order to ensure that the Board are considering the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people in care, in the delivery, development, and assessment of services as much as possible. As such, below is an outline of the options that are available to consider alongside some understanding as to what is taking place in other Local Authorities across the region.

Option 1)

That the Corporate Parenting Board remains a committee meeting. Reports, minutes and the meeting will take place in public and/or private depending on the sensitivities and participants taking place in the meeting.

For example, reports considering items such as the Board's annual report, Corporate Parenting Board Strategy and performance reports would take place in public and be minuted.

Items which require the discussions of individual children in care would take place in private session as allowed by S100a of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended). Minutes would be taken with a public and private set produced.

By doing this the current functions of the current committee are maintained whilst allowing the discussions held to be free for the young people to express themselves. This is in line with the current arrangements whereby there is the ability to conduct full meetings of Corporate Parenting Board in public unless confidential information is to be disclosed.

Further to this it is suggested that the Board adopts an approach that allows for split sessions that include both formal board meetings and interactive sessions with the young people themselves. This has been undertaken before and worked well in regard to providing the young people to engage in discussions in a less formal manner and in an environment that young people are more comfortable with.

It is also suggested that engagement sessions are held at the TLC and that agendas are planned accordingly to ensure that opportunities are maximised to seek full engagement from young people. The work programme set at the Corporate Parenting Board in July 2023 reflects this proposal and is attached. This will mean in the coming year there will be 3 formal meetings and two interactive sessions at the TLC.

It is also suggested that formal meetings take place in committee rooms without microphones and young people have the option to attend if appropriate or required.

Finally, that the arrangements are reviewed by the Board in 12 months' time.

Option 2)

The Corporate Parenting Board is disestablished by Council and replaced by a sub-committee of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Under this proposal, the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee would become the overall scrutineer of services to children in care and care leavers. Whilst the Corporate Parenting Board are fully committed to delivering against the principles and priorities outlined in the strategy, proposing a new sub-committee arrangement will allow for the subcommittee to take forward the priorities and any other issues which emerge locally or nationally which we need to be sighted on and responsive to. This approach would be committed to taking a partnership approach to solutions and also to using best practice to inform how we work with children in care and care leavers in Walsall.

The sub-committee would be required to work within the legislative parameters as described under option one. The sub-committee would need to be established by the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, there would need to be consideration as to whether the Chairing of the Sub-Committee required a special responsibility allowance.

Option 3)

That the Corporate Parenting Board remains a stand-alone meeting with full publication of both papers and discussions held.

Regional Picture

Birmingham Childrens Trust - In Birmingham they hold six Boards a year. Two of these are young people's 'takeover Boards' in which the young people run the agenda and have a range of 'Asks' of the Board and this forms part of the actions that are ultimately agreed and tracked. The other 4 meetings they don't expect young people to attend but they have apprentices who attend to link and support all of the groups and forums that ultimately feed into the overall governance of the Board. These are not formal committee meetings.

Sandwell – whilst they do hold their Corporate Parenting Boards as committee meetings, they do not make public the conversation held and only publish the reports that have been presented. Like us, Sandwell are trying to improve on the number of young people that participate in such events, and they are currently refreshing their participation and corporate parenting strategy to reflect this.

Shropshire - has a Corporate Parenting Steering Board that is not public facing. However, there is agreement from the CPSB for when documents need to go to Cabinet or Full Council. They have subgroups that feed into their CPSB and have 3 or 4 measurable and clear priorities to work on in line with their key practice priorities. Like most, they struggle to engage young people and are also looking to further develop their work around participation.

Coventry – Similarly to Shropshire, Coventry uses their Corporate Parenting Board as an advisory committee to the Childrens Portfolio Holder and has a young person appointed as Co-Chair. These remain committee meetings, but they are also exploring ways in which this can be less formal in order to make it more inclusive for young people.

What is clear from enquiries into alternative models is that there is no consistent approach to how local authorities conduct Corporate Parenting Boards but that all Boards are working to improve young people engagement.

Contact Officer

Zoe Morgan, Head of Service - Corporate Parenting
zoe.morgan@walsall.gov.uk