

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES & TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 10
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Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services

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REVISION TO CORPORATE PARENTING GROUP

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To highlight the role of councillors as corporate parents and consider the review of the current Corporate Parenting Group and advise on proposed changes to the Group.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee are asked to:
- (1) note the contents of this report recognising the important role that councillors have as corporate parents
 - (2) to make any recommendations on the review of the Corporate Parenting Group to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services that the Committee think necessary

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 3.1 The work of the Corporate Parenting Group is pivotal to ensuring that social, educational and welfare outcomes for looked after children are met.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 When they are elected, all Members take on the role of 'corporate parent' to children looked after by their local authority. They have a duty to take an interest in the wellbeing and development of those children, as if they were their own. Although the lead member for children's services has particular responsibilities, the role of corporate parent is carried by all Members, regardless of their role on the council.
- 4.2 The present Corporate Parenting Group (CPG) meets on a bi-monthly basis and is an all party group with a Chair from the current administration. The CPG reports to the Cabinet Member for Children Services and annually to this Committee. The group focuses its work predominantly on the views of looked after children from the Children in Care Council. This group is made up of 15 children and young people from a cohort of 360 looked after children. Approximately 3 children from this group attend the panel as being representative of the Children in Care Council. Two foster carers also attend.
- 4.3 The agenda is set at a pre-meeting with the Head of Service for looked after children and has a work programme. In order to strengthen the Group, the Assistant Director of Safeguarding now attends as well as officers from our Conference and Review Service, Adoption and Fostering and Commissioning service. The Service Manager for looked after children has been the responsible officer for the Panel with assistance from the Head of the Virtual School.
- 4.4 All Members are invited to attend the CPG but attendance has been variable. There is concern that having no fixed membership can contribute to poor attendance which, in turn, can lead to an inconsistency of approach.

4.5 A new Chair has added increased impetus and rigour to the focus of the group and it is therefore considered timely to build upon this to strengthen the Group.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 The first proposal would be to develop the current CPG into a fixed membership panel renamed the "Corporate Parenting Panel". Members who regularly attend the current CPG have been approached about joining a fixed membership Panel. It is necessary for a Cabinet Member Decision Notice (CMDN) to be agreed by the Executive Member for Children's Services to create this new Panel.

5.2 It is proposed that the current Chair and Vice Chair remain in their positions in the new Panel although it is, of course, for the members of the Panel to decide their own arrangements. The Chair and Vice Chair however are commended for their approach to the work of the Panel.

5.3 The Panel will continue to meet bi-monthly and these dates will remain in the civic calendar but the terms of reference will be revised as shown at appendix A. Members of this Committee are invited to comment upon the proposed terms of reference.

5.4 All Members can attend the meeting and there will be a standing agenda, items for any questions and issues from Members.

A work programme will be proposed for the Panel which would include:

(1) our accommodation strategy – our early prevention/ intervention to support children at home to prevent accommodation

(2) the number of children in care and discharges

(3) our leaving care service

(4) the quality of placements (including out of city placements)

(5) our reviewing service

(6) our independent Regulation 33 reports

(7) activity of our secure unit

(8) complaints from looked after children

(9) stability of placements

This Committee is invited to recommend other work projects for the Panel.

5.5 It is proposed that once the Panel has established itself this Committee may want to scrutinise the Council's role as Corporate Parent and/or work of our adoption and fostering service to provide timely and quality placements for our looked after children.

5.6 The Corporate Councillor Champion role will be further defined. Champions will be invited to participate and may request that agenda items be added or be requested to add to the agenda items at the discretion of the Chair.

5.7 Regular reports and the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel will be provided to the Scrutiny Committee six monthly but Members might want to consider whether to receive more regular reports on the work of the Panel. This will give the Panel greater focus on improving overall outcomes for children in care including raising educational attainment and narrowing the gap, health outcomes and ensuring leisure and work and employment opportunities.

5.8 Representatives from the Children in Care Council will attend the Panel at the discretion of the chair and/or arrangement made for the Panel members to meet with the Chair prior to the Panel meeting.

5.9 Members of the reconfigured panel would also be encouraged to visit foster children in their placement and in residential care to learn first hand about the care experiences of some of our looked after children.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council has several statutory obligations towards children in its care. Together these comprise the role of corporate parent and are addressed in the proposals set out at paragraph 5.4 of this report. A Government white paper "Care matters: time for change" in 2007 set out the various ways in which this Council is expected to fulfil its Corporate Parenting role.
- 6.2 Further useful guidance on the role of the corporate parent can be found on the Local Government Association website which undertook a review of the corporate parenting role in 2011.
- 6.3 A Cabinet Member Decision Notice will be required to constitute the Panel as the Executive Member for Children's Services is responsible for ensuring the Council fulfils its corporate parenting functions. The Panel will be a non decision making informal meeting (i.e. not a committee) and as such all decisions affecting the delivery of any functions or budget spend will have to be approved by the Executive Member or any officer exercising functions delegated by the Executive Member.
- 6.4 There are no financial implications arising from this report which cannot be met from existing budget. The Panel will replace the existing Group and members of the Panel will not be given an allowance as this does not constitute a formal committee.
- 6.5 There are no other statutory obligations arising which affect this report.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Members are currently being consulted on the proposals for fixed membership of the Committee.
- 7.2 The Cabinet Member for Children's Services has been consulted and endorses this proposal subject to any views expressed by this Committee.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 Following consideration by the Committee, and subject to any comments made by this Committee, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services will be asked to agree a decision to constitute the new Panel.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 9.1 None

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Appendix A: revised terms of reference

PETERBOROUGH CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE

Corporate Parenting Panel

1. Our Commitment to Children and Young People in care:

Peterborough City Council is committed to raising the quality of life of everyone living within the city. For children in particular, the city council aims to provide high quality opportunities for learning and ensure children are healthy and safe. It is important that the Corporate Parenting Panel members ensure that the Council provides such care, education and opportunities that the Panel would be afforded to their own children.

2. Purpose:

- i) To lead on behalf of the Council and partners of the Local Authority to ensure that all services directly provided for children and young people in care and care leavers are scrutinised to deliver to a high standard and to all statutory requirements.
- ii) To raise the aspiration, ambitions and life chances of children and young people in care, narrowing the gap of achievement between children in care and their peers.
- iii) To ensure that children in care are protected and supported to develop as healthy citizens, able to participate in their community.
- iv) To ensure that all elected members are aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities and that all Council services are mindful of the needs of children in care and respond accordingly within their particular remit.

3. Functions of the Panel:

- i) To receive statutory reports in relation to the adoption, fostering, commissioning, looked after children (LAC) services and children's homes with a view to recommending any changes.
- ii) Ensure that the profile of the corporate parenting agenda is incorporated into key plans, policies and strategies through out the Council overseeing interagency working arrangements. Review complaints from looked after children to ensure officers have dealt with these appropriately and made any recommendations for change.
- iii) Raise awareness in Peterborough City Council and the wider community by promoting the role of members as corporate parents and the Council as a large corporate family with key responsibilities.
- iv) Raise the profile of the needs of looked after children and care leavers through a range of actions including through the organising of celebratory events for the recognition of achievement.
- v) Ensure that leisure, cultural, further education and employment opportunities are offered and taken up by our looked after children and care leavers.
- vi) Promote the development of participation and ensure that the view of children and young people are regularly heard through the Corporate Parenting Panel to improve educational, health and social outcomes to raise aspiration and attainments.

- vii) Undertake meetings with children and young people in care, frontline staff and foster carers to inform the committee of the standards of care and improvement outcomes for looked after children.
- viii) Monitor the ongoing commitment to providing support, training and clarity of expectations to foster carers to achieve excellent and high quality care.
- ix) To appoint elected members as Champions for Children in Care in respect of the following strands:
 - Housing
 - Employment and training opportunities within council departments and with partner agencies
 - Health
 - Educational Attainment and access to Higher Education
 - Recreation and Leisure activities
 - Finance and benefits

4. Children in Care Council

Representatives from the Children in Care Council will attend the Corporate Parenting Panel at the discretion of the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

5. Work Programme

The Corporate Parenting Panel will meet every two months, formally agreeing a skeleton work programme annually and reviewing at each meeting. In reviewing the work programme, the panel may agree to request reports on particular matters of their own volition or as advised by the lead officer.

6. Performance Monitoring

The Corporate Parenting Panel will scrutinise and monitor outcomes for children in care and care leavers. To this end, the panel will develop and agree a core data set which it wishes to receive at each panel meeting. Additional detailed monitoring reports will be presented in accordance with the agreed work programme on the following key aspects of care:

- Placement stability
- Independent child care reviews
- The performance of all care standards regulated services:
 - Adoption and adoption support
 - Fostering
 - Children's homes
- Service to care leavers, including accommodation, education, employment and training
- The health needs of children in care
- Educational attainment of children in care

7. Membership of the Panel

There will be standing membership of the Corporate Parenting Panel to provide continuity and consistency. Elected Councillors outside the standing membership will be invited to discuss issues and raise questions within a standing agenda item at the end of the meeting.

A chair will be appointed by the panel.

A vice chair will be appointed by the panel.

Membership will also include two foster carers and representatives from the Children in Care Council.

8. Officer support

- The Director of Children's Services is responsible for ensuring that the panel has sufficient officer support to lead the council's corporate parenting strategy.
- The Assistant Director, Safeguarding, will be the lead officer for the panel together with the Service Managers for Looked after Children, Leaving Care, Adoption and Fostering, the Head of the Virtual School and the Children's Services Participation Officer.
- Democratic Services will provide the administrative arrangements and constitutional guidance to the panel.

9. Frequency of meetings:

Meetings will be bi-monthly preceded by an agenda setting meeting.

10. Reporting Mechanisms:

The Corporate Parenting Panel will report to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and to the Scrutiny Panel on a six monthly basis or more frequently if required.