

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 9
20 MARCH 2019	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Corporate Parenting Committee Chairman	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Sam Smith, Cabinet Member for Children's Services.	
Contact Officer(s):	Nicola Curley Assistant Director Children's Services	Tel. 864065

REPORT ON WORK OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE FOR THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S	
FROM: Corporate Parenting Committee Chairman	Deadline date: Date to be confirmed
<p>It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agrees that the annual report is an accurate reflection of the work of the Committee over the last 12 months; and 2. Agrees to submit the annual report to the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee for noting as per the Corporate Parenting Committee's Terms of Reference. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to Corporate Parenting Committee following Children and Education Scrutiny Committee requiring an annual report on the role of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee of activity carried out the Corporate Parenting Committee in the municipal year 2018-19

2.2 This report is for Corporate Parenting Committee to consider under all its Terms of Reference number 2.4.6.4 The Corporate Parenting Committee will report to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and to the Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis or more frequently if required.

2.3 The report addresses all areas of the Children in Care pledge and the Care Leavers' Charter. It specifically demonstrates to Scrutiny how the Committee has been addressing the increase in the Children in Care population; the changes to the partnership with TACT; and Children in Care and Care Leavers' education and training needs. It notes the Good judgement for the experience and progress of Children in Care and Care Leavers in the Ofsted Inspection in the summer of 2018, but also the importance of the Committee holding officers to account in relation to the continuing developments required by the report.

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 Following the changes engendered by the Ofsted Inspection of 2015, the Corporate Parenting Committee has continued to work to support the needs and ambitions of the Council's Children in Care and Care Leavers.

4.1.1 The meeting format has continued to work well, especially at engaging our young people, and in depth discussion of issues relevant to our Children in Care and Care Leavers.

4.2 Work Programme and Reporting Mechanisms

4.2.1 The thematic meetings have continued, where a single topic is considered in depth to enable councillors to fully understand the complexity of the issue in the round, have a proper opportunity to scrutinise the information before them and challenge officers in a timely and thorough manner. The Committee focuses on 3 key areas for children and young people: education; placement; and health. These are linked across the formal and informal meetings, and have been effective in developing ideas and themes for Members to scrutinise.

4.2.2 The final area of development related to bespoke reporting mechanisms for the Corporate Parenting Committee. QlikSense is now the standard reporting tool across Children's Services, and it is possible to monitor all current activity very effectively. The development of a static report for Corporate Parenting Committee has taken a bit of time, but the Committee will now be trialling a new report format. Recommended amendments will be reviewed by the Business Intelligence team, and we hope to produce a final version for the start of the new municipal year.

4.3 Corporate Parenting Champions

4.3.1 This has continued to be an effective use of Member influence. Champions are Members who sit on the Committee, but have also volunteered to take a particular lead for an area that impacts on Children in Care and Care Leavers.

4.3.2 The Corporate Parenting Champions 2018–2019 have been:

Area of Focus	Champion	Officer Lead
Housing	Councillor Stokes	Sean Evans
Employment And Training Opportunities Within The Council Departments And Partner Agencies	Councillor Ayres	Pat Carrington
Health	Councillor Aitken (role currently vacant)	Deborah Spencer
Education Attainment and Access To Higher Education	Councillor Ayres	Dee Glover
Recreation and Leisure Activities	Councillor Smith	Sian Stevens - now Jodie Wallis
Finance and Benefits	Councillor Bond	Emma Kavanaugh
Effective Care Planning	Councillor Jones	Sarah Adams

4.3.3 In between each informal Committee the Corporate Parenting Champion has been responsible for the following:

- a) Meeting with the Lead Officer;
- b) Undertaking a site visit;

- c) Meeting with a child in care / young person / service user / other officers and discuss their experience of the service for Children in Care; and
- d) Contributing to a brief report back to the Committee.

4.3.4 A new Champion role was created at the suggestion of Councillor Jones, out of discussion around the availability of suitable placements for our children. This is the Effective Care Planning Champion, and Cllr Jones will be working with some of our Children in Care Council and officers to revise the paperwork used to identify new foster and residential placements for children and young people. In order to create this role, it was recognised that the Committee needed to request a change in its terms of reference to allow the Committee Members to set and appoint to the champion positions themselves. This was agreed by the Council and can be seen at: Part 3, Section 2 Regulatory Functions 2.4.4.6 (f) pg 43.

4.3.5 The Health Champion, Councillor Aitken, had also been working on an updated version of the Health passport for Care Leavers in response to feedback from our young people, and this ties in with feedback from the Ofsted Inspection as well. The plan is to introduce this at a much earlier stage for young people, and ensure that they are familiar with its contents and usefulness to them before they leave the care of the Local Authority.

4.3.6 Councillor Ayres, in her role as Employment and Training Opportunities Champion, has been extremely persistent in raising the needs of our Care Leavers at every meeting in this area. The Committee has continued to be supportive of the development of apprenticeship proposals for Care Leavers, and we are really pleased to report that two Care Leavers have now taken up apprenticeships with our partners, TACT and Serco, and these are working well.

4.4 Specific Focus of Work

CIC Population

4.4.1 Over the last year, we have seen increased numbers of children and young people in care in Peterborough. At the end of January, this was 380 children altogether. Comparative data for the financial year 2017/18 on children in care nationally was published in the autumn of 2018. This data evidences that increased numbers in care are not just a Peterborough issue; numbers nationally and among our statistical neighbours have also increased significantly. Indeed, here in Peterborough we are looking after a considerably lower number of children in care compared with the average of the 10 most similar authorities to us. Expressed as a rate of children in care per 10,000, as of the end of January 2019, we were looking after 76 children and young people per 10,000 of our population of children and young people aged 0-17 years. The national data set shows that this average rate has increased to 86.1 in the financial year 2017/18 for our statistical neighbours.

4.4.2 So, while our numbers have increased, numbers in similar authorities have increased significantly more rapidly. This provides evidence that our approach in Peterborough is effective, but it also means that officers such as Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers are needing to manage more work, and that placements for children will be increasingly difficult to find, reducing placement choice for children and young people. If foster placements are not available, we then need to consider residential options, and often need to start looking further afield, particularly for our older young people.

The Corporate Parenting Committee has monitored these pressures closely, and taken action where some of these issues have had implications for the education of Children in Care placed out of area.

4.5 Ofsted Inspection June 2018

4.5.1 Ofsted carried out a standard Inspection of Peterborough's Children's Services under their new Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework in June 2018. This was the

first judgement Inspection in three years, and it is extremely pleasing to note that Peterborough was found to be Good in all categories.

4.5.2 In relation to Children in Care and Care Leavers, Ofsted stated that children came into care at the right time, and that their placements were generally stable and met their needs. Inspectors also noted that our planning and support for children who are unaccompanied asylum seekers was a strength. They acknowledged that the designated nurse for Children in Care provided robust oversight of the health needs of children and that performance in providing initial health assessments, health reviews and dental checks showed sustained improvement. This had been a particular area of scrutiny for the Committee, and the recognition of this improvement was welcome. Ofsted also noted that foster carer recruitment and support was of good quality, and that disabled children achieve permanence and stability in placements that meet their long-term needs. They also continued to affirm the adoption performance of the service, saying that fostering for adoption was a particular strength for us.

4.5.3 In relation to Care Leavers, the Inspectors stated that they received very good support from social workers and personal advisers. They saw improvements in more collaborative pathway planning, and that we had focused on aspirations for work, education and volunteering for Care Leavers. There was evidence of the consideration of their identity, health and emotional wellbeing needs. They also felt that the Personal Advisers knew their young people well and remained in very regular contact with them; they felt that they acted as strong advocates for young people.

4.5.4 Most pleasingly, the Inspectors stated that:

“There has been significant progress in strengthening corporate parenting. Young people run alternate corporate parenting committee meetings and support active children in care councils for different age groups. Elected members make changes based on the feedback that they seek from young people. In addition, members act as ‘corporate parenting champions’ for improvements in specific areas of need, an example of this being the successful challenge to improve children’s uptake of dental checks”

4.5.5 Of course, there were also still areas for improvement, particularly around educational aspiration and achievement for children. The Inspectors felt that children’s personal education plans continued to need input from children themselves, and that it had been taking too long to develop opportunities for Care Leavers. The information around educational progress was not yet provided for the Committee in a timely way in order for it to exercise effective scrutiny of the issue, and this needed to improve.

4.5.6 There were five areas that Ofsted formally highlighted as requiring improvement:

- Assessments of children who are missing or who are at risk from child sexual exploitation.
- The use of chronologies in underpinning children’s assessments.
- The number of return interviews that are successfully completed with children who have been missing from care.
- The quality of information provided to care leavers about their rights and entitlements, including how to access their health histories.
- Consistency of management oversight, including recording of casework supervision across all social work teams.

4.5.7 An action plan has been developed in relation to these, and updates in relation to the individual actions will be scrutinised by the Corporate Parenting Committee regularly. The Corporate Parenting Champions have already been involved in some of the activity to address the performance in these areas (see 4.3)

4.6 TACT Partnership

4.6.1 The Committee has maintained close oversight of the new commissioned arrangements with TACT. The Permanency Service has now been in operation for almost two years, and has seen some changes to its original specification. TACT had taken on responsibility for the Placement

budget and commissioning of all external placements, and whilst there was a synergy in terms of in house fostering activity, there were also disadvantages in terms of how a charity could engage with the market in comparison with a Local Authority. A decision was taken to return that area of work to the Council, and this was completed in the autumn of 2018 with no disruption to service.

- 4.6.2 The other change to the arrangements has been led by the national requirement to commission a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). Negotiation with the Department for Education meant that we could set this separate entity up in conjunction with Cambridgeshire County Council, but still needed a Voluntary Adoption Agency to run it on behalf of both Councils. This has been the subject of a formal tender process, to which TACT were invited to bid. The process is still underway at the time of writing this report, and a formal decision is due in early summer.
- 4.6.3 These have been significant issues to address, and have at times, hampered the ability of the service to dedicate itself fully to the recruitment of in house foster carers. The existing carers continue to affirm the improvements in the training and support offer from TACT, so it is felt that this situation will improve significantly over the next financial year. The carers that are coming through the recruitment pipeline are improving the diversity of the group, and enabling more local options for adolescents. The Foster Carers' Committee is represented at the formal Corporate Parenting Committee meetings, and has been contributing to the increasingly effective scrutiny of officers. Adoption performance had slowed, but this has been more to do with the continuing national trend away from adoption as the preferred permanence option, than any activity by the Local Authority or TACT. We continue to work with the courts to try and address this through clear care planning and strong evidence based practice.
- 4.6.4 The Committee reviews the TACT partnership on a formal basis annually, but also receives quarterly briefing notes on activity. It has sought specific updates around the innovation projects running within TACT, and has created a new Corporate Parenting Champion due to its concerns around the lack of placement choice and a decrease in placement stability earlier in the year. The Committee is aware of the logistical pressure on the service in light of the increasing CIC numbers, but continues to hold officers to the same high expectations of service delivery to children and young people.

4.7 Meeting Educational Needs

- 4.7.1 As also identified by Ofsted, there has been a general recognition of a lack of some aspiration for the children and young people of Peterborough in educational terms. This has also translated itself into the ambition we have for our children and young people in care, and the Corporate Parenting Committee has challenged itself and officers to think more creatively about achievement for our children and young people in this area. The Virtual School has been asked to report in a more timely way about young people's academic results, as well as providing their formal validated report, and there is an ongoing project to enhance the function and meaningfulness of Personal Education Plans. The work on apprenticeships is already bearing fruit, as stated above.
- 4.7.2 The Committee also identified a growing trend where Children in Care's educational progress was being negatively impacted by their placement outside of the local area. To meet children's emotional or physical needs, sometimes placements can only be sourced outside of Peterborough, or because of the lack of placement choice, we are forced to identify foster placements across Local Authority borders. This means that another Authority becomes responsible for meeting the child's educational needs, and this can become more challenging if the local school is an Academy with its own admission criteria. Children in Care with Education, Health and Social Care Plans (EHCPs) are an even more specific minority, and identifying a school place after a placement move can take months in some cases. The Corporate Parenting Committee has expressed significant concern about this, and has now written to the Secretary of State for Education to ask him to address the issue on a national level.

4.8 Best Practice Example

- 4.8.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee continues to be seen as a model of best practice, and has the intention of developing a one day conference that other Local Authorities in the Eastern Region may wish to attend. This will be an opportunity to promote best practice for Children in Care, and to promote the Council as continuing to innovate across many areas of delivery.

4.9 Links to the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers' Drop In

- 4.9.1 The Children in Care Council continues to meet on a monthly basis, and has 8 regular members. The group is well attended during school holiday periods when activities are offered in addition to the normal meeting. In the last 12 months, along with their co-chairing duties at the informal Corporate Parenting Committee meetings, the group has:

- Met with young people from across the eastern region to develop a short film of 10 top tips for social workers
- Given feedback to the IROs on their review paperwork
- Planned and delivered the annual celebration events for children in care
- Spoken at Corporate Parenting Committee about their experiences in different placements.
- Written to all children in care to share the June 2018 Ofsted report.

- 4.9.2 The 'Children in Charge' youth group for children aged between 8 and 12 continues to meet in alternating weeks. It is regularly attended by an average of 10 young people. Seven members met with Ofsted at the inspection and were able to share all the activities they have been up to very articulately.

- 4.9.3 The Care Leavers' drop in continues to operate, attracting an average of 6 young people at each session. They will be consulted on the new "passport to independence" piece of work that aims to address issues around access to benefits, housing and training opportunities. There are discussions with Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Housing colleagues about them attending the drop in on a semi-regular basis to offer more specialist knowledge and advice to the group, and some members already utilise the Job Club on the same site. Two Care Leavers have been successful in gaining places on the community garden renovation group with Axiom Housing, and this will start in the spring. The group is also interested in identifying a new venue, and will be supported with this going forward.

- 4.9.4 A full activity programme was offered to children and young people in the summer encompassing a variety of activities and events curated by Children in Care Council members for young people to increase reach and engagement with this group. Engagement for summer 2018 was 363 attendances by 122 young people over 12 sessions, with an additional 20 young people participating in the National Citizenship Service.

- 4.9.5 The celebration events in February 2019 half-term were attended by a number of members of the Corporate Parenting Committee, and these were extremely enjoyable experiences for all involved.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The Children in Care Council has been fully aware and consulted upon the changes referred to in this paper. The feedback from them to date is that working with the Committee is a very positive experience, and that they value the opportunity to work with the Corporate Parenting Champions.
- 5.2 The report has been shared with Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children Services in line with the Corporate Parenting Committee Terms of Reference.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

6.1 If the Corporate Parenting Committee agrees the recommendations in this report, it will be presented to the next Children and Education Scrutiny Committee in the new municipal year 2019 - 2020.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

7.1 For presentation at Children and Education Scrutiny Committee.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 N/A

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

9.1 There are none.

Legal Implications

9.2 This is a factual report, to be agreed by the Committee.

Other Implications

9.3 This report provides information on the role of the Corporate Parenting Committee and relates to services provided to children in care and care leavers. This ensures that Scrutiny Committee are aware of changes to processes and the outcome for children in care and care leavers.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

10.1 N/A

11. APPENDICES

11.1 None

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