

PEOPLE (CHILDREN) SCRUTINY PANEL

31 July 2014

CORPORATE PARENTING

Report of the Director for People

STRATEGIC AIM:	Creating a Brighter Future for All
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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report sets out proposals for a corporate parenting strategy and board.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Scrutiny Panel note and comment upon the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy

2.2 That Scrutiny Panel note and comment upon the governance and chairing arrangements for the board

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 Corporate Parenting is the term used to refer to the collective responsibility of the Council to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are 'looked after', that is, those who are in the public care. The corporate parenting role is shared across the Council and front line staff can only do a good job if there is effective corporate leadership.

3.2 This report sets out the arrangements that currently exist to fulfil this collective responsibility and proposals to strengthen these arrangements. Ofsted's new inspection framework outlines the focus on leadership, management and governance that includes the corporate parenting role and the implementation of the new framework provides a good opportunity to strengthen the current arrangements.

3.3 Effective corporate parenting needs a commitment from all council employees and elected members and an authority wide approach. This responsibility for Local Authorities was first laid out in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004. Government guidance for Councillors was first set out in "*If this were my child*" 2003 but superseded in 2013 by "*Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice*" which laid out clearly the leading role of Councillors in ensuring that their Council acts as an effective corporate parent for every child in care, actively supporting standards of care and seeking high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their child.

- 3.4** This is further strengthened across the East Midlands region in the *Assured Safeguarding Document* which was developed to support Directors of Children's Services and Elected Lead Members in assuring themselves that their organisation is compliant and effective in relation to the safeguarding of children.

The Objectives of a Corporate Strategy

- 3.5** The specific objective of this strategy is to ensure that the corporate parenting responsibilities for all Councillors and Council employees are clearly outlined, in order that:
- a)** Councillors have a clear understanding and awareness of the issues for looked after children in their authority so that they can ensure that their responsibilities as corporate parents are reflected in all aspects of the work of the Council.
 - b)** All service departments are aware of the corporate parenting agenda, and have mechanisms in place to continually monitor and review the means by which their services contribute to positive outcomes for looked after children
 - c)** Policies and practices promote access to services for looked after children and their carers.
 - d)** The corporate parenting commitment is realised through a quality of care and range of opportunities that lead to measurable improvement in the life chances of looked after children - enabling them to succeed in line with their peers
 - e)** Communication between elected members and looked after children is facilitated to achieve participation and inclusion, so that children and young people have a say in how decisions are made about the services that affect them, and that they have an opportunity to influence those decisions.
 - f)** Executive members are supported by officers to promote partnership working as a pre-requisite of delivering effective services to looked after children, and to ensure that the joint planning and commissioning framework continues to deliver to this agenda.
 - g)** The Council provides effective scrutiny of corporate parenting duties.

Current Position

- 3.6** Rutland County Council currently has 37 looked after children in their care. In addition there are approximately 30 care leavers at any time. The term 'looked after' refers to any child or young person for whom the authority has, or shares, parental responsibility, or for whom the authority provides care and accommodation to the child or young person on behalf of their parent.
- 3.7** Rutland has a good record in achieving successful outcomes for the majority of the children in its care in comparison with other local authorities. There has been a long standing corporate commitment to meeting the needs of 'looked after' children and promoting positive outcomes.
- 3.8** The corporate parenting requirements were previously met within the LAC and Care Leavers Strategy meetings. Cabinet and Children's Scrutiny Panels receive regular reports on the Council's work with looked after children, principally through the quarterly safeguarding performance reports and the annual Independent Reviewing Officer report, that sets out the outcomes for Rutland's children in care.

- 3.9** Rutland Corporate Parenting Strategy (Appendix A) been refreshed to ensure that all the requirements are being met. The overall aim of the strategy will be to reinforce the corporate responsibility of the whole council, and its partner agencies, through commitment to a range of initiatives which reflect national and local policies and best practice. To be effective it requires the active engagement of all service areas of the County Council, elected members and key partners.
- 3.10** Currently Rutland does not have a corporate parenting board which means there is no cross council forum or multi agency forum with participation/engagement from members that focuses on the specific needs of 'looked after children. The Children in Care Council and Independent Reviewing Officer report to the Children's Trust and ensure that the 'voice of the child' is heard but 'looked after children' do not attend the Trust regularly or meet with members in a systematic way.
- 3.11** The statutory role of Independent Reviewing Officer was brought in-house during 2011/12 and one of their responsibilities is to report annually to Senior Management Team, Cabinet, Scrutiny and the Children's Trust on the progress and achievements of looked after children.
- 3.12** The pledge for 'Looked After' children was a significant piece of work undertaken previously and this needs to be re-visited within the new arrangements to make sure it is 'fit for purpose'.

Recommendations

- 3.13** Establish a Corporate Parenting Board with immediate effect, outlining membership (including looked after children), purpose, terms of reference, governance, monitoring and reporting arrangements.
- 3.14** Review and refresh the Corporate Parenting Strategy
- 3.15** Re-fresh and re-launch the Pledge (see attached) which is part of the pack sent to every Looked after Child in Rutland

Corporate Parenting Board proposal

- 3.16** Board to meet twice a year to be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Children and include representation from other elected members, the children in care council (SUSO), the Director of People and SMT members. This would reflect regional and national Corporate Parenting Board arrangements. An officer task group will support the board. This Officer task group will meet quarterly and will drive the key actions from the Board
- 3.17** The purpose of the Board will be to:
- a)** Provide a forum for Children in Care to influence policy, service developments, practice, etc so that there is continuous improvement
 - b)** Take a strategic overview of Rutland County Council's and partner agencies responsibilities towards Children in Care.

c) Ensure there are good joint working arrangements between Council Departments, with partner agencies and hold them to account for good high quality service delivery.

d) Ensure that relevant new initiatives, plans, policies, and service developments are presented to the Board for consultation.

e) Monitor the performance of all the key stakeholders by receiving annual progress reports in relation to the 5 Outcomes, including for Care Leavers.

f) Receive annual reports from the Adoption and Fostering Services in relation to recruitment and retention of carers, placement stability and the 4 annual IRO report

3.18 Board to provide annual reports to Children and Young People's Trust Board, Local Safeguarding Children's Board, Children's Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet.

3.19 A supporter/advocate may be needed for the representative from the children in care council.

3.20 Establish clear measures of success to support improvement work in relation to looked after children.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

RISK	IMPACT	COMMENTS
Time	H	Need to make progress on these issues in this financial year.
Viability	M	Board is viable.
Finance	L	No additional costs are anticipated at this stage
Profile	H	Inspection risks around corporate parenting are high given the regulation of this area of activity
Equality and Diversity	M	Rutland provides bespoke responses to the diverse cohort as required.

Background Papers
Appendix A

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A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.