



Report for Group Leaders Meeting

1 October 2015

Report of the Director of Childrens Services Education and Skills

Corporate Parenting in York – Briefing Note

Summary

1. The City of York, Multi Agency Looked after Childrens Partnership [MALAP] executive group is currently reviewing and refreshing the City's strategic plan for Looked After Children. In developing this new plan, the MALAP executive has recognised the need for even greater ambition in terms of the outcomes achieved by the children and young people in public care.

Following extensive consultation with Looked After Children, those who care for them and the professionals involved in their lives, it has become clear that nothing short of a 'radical change' to some of the conventional and prescribed arrangements for the care of looked after children will consistently deliver the best outcomes possible.

In these circumstances, the effective scrutiny, challenge and support by elected members of the development and delivery of the new strategy is perhaps more important than ever.

This short briefing note sets out an overview of the legal requirements for Members in the discharge of their corporate parenting responsibilities. It also proposes the development of some new arrangements to ensure that Members have every opportunity to shape, influence and drive a new strategic approach that seeks to ensure **every** looked after child has the opportunity to be safe, thrive and achieve throughout their minority and on into adult life.

Background

2. The Law

The Lead Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services are required by law to hold direct local accountability for the effectiveness, availability and value for money of the local authority's children's services, particularly education and children's social care. The functions of the Lead Member and Director of Children's Services are set out in section 18(2) of the Children Act 2004.

- The lead member holds political accountability for all local authority children's services, including education and social care;
- The Director of Children's Services holds the professional accountability.

Both the Lead Member and the Director of Children's Services have a shared responsibility with all officers and members of the local authority to act as effective and caring corporate parents for looked after children.

All councillors have a duty as a corporate parent for looked after children and the lead member has a key role in ensuring all members are aware of this shared responsibility.

Corporate Parent

3. The Role - Overview

The new strategic plan will describe the City's aspirations for all children and young people looked after by the City of York

Our aspirations for looked after children are simple - we want our children and young people to have everything that good parents want for their children: to be happy and healthy, safe and protected and supported each step of the way to adult life.

Practical corporate parenting responsibilities include ensuring:

- A sufficient supply of appropriate, high quality placements, for all children in care (recruiting enough foster carers, providing appropriate foster care placements and high quality residential placements);

- Efficient plans for adoption, adopter recruitment, or special guardianship where appropriate;
- Enabling a supported transition to adulthood - support when leaving care, access to good jobs, higher education, good housing and financial security.

Every local authority must have arrangements in place to enable elected members to judge that they are satisfied that the corporate parenting arrangements are effective.

In York, the City has exploited a range of opportunities to make sure that Members are well sighted on some of the key services and activities, these include:

- membership of the Council's Adoption Panel,
- membership of the Council's Fostering Panel
- allocated as named visitors to the Council's short break provision at The Glen
- allocated as named visitors to Wenlock Terrace – a childrens home. membership of the children in care council 'Show Me I Matter'

To date the Council also convened a Corporate Parenting Board. Comprising a cross party forum where elected members review and monitor relevant reports and data presented by officers and multi agency partners. This has been a useful opportunity for elected members to challenge and comment on the overall effectiveness of the City's arrangements for the care of its Looked After Children.

Review of Arrangements

4. Proposal for a Review of Elected Member engagement in and scrutiny of Corporate Parenting Arrangements

Taken together the arrangements described above have served well to ensure that elected members are well sighted on all key aspects of the care of Looked after Children. However, the approach described above can be reductive in terms of the opportunities it provides to the wider political leadership across the Council to engage in this work.

This short briefing paper proposes a review of the above arrangements to identify an approach that maximises the opportunity for the widest

possible member engagement in the effective discharge of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities.

This wider and sustained involvement of elected members can help to ensure that across all of its functions (e.g. as an employer, landlord) the Council seeks to prioritise the outcomes for those children in its direct care.

This review is proposed not in response to a model that is not working but in recognition of the potentially untapped opportunities the Council and its partners could create.

To fully inform the discussion about extended Corporate Parenting arrangements for the City. A draft revised Looked after Childrens Strategy 2015 – 2020 will be available for consultation by November 2015. This document will clearly articulate the greater ambitions and the 'radical changes' required to achieve the best possible outcomes for all of the City's Looked after Children.

Recommendations

5. Recommendations - next steps for Corporate Parenting in York

Group Leaders are asked to support the following recommendations aimed at strengthening corporate parenting arrangements in the City.

That we:

- Seek full Council endorsement for the new and refocused strategy for looked after children, setting out our collective ambition and actions, articulating the outcomes we all wish to see for this group of children and young people;
- Refresh the focus, role and composition of the Corporate Parenting Board to reflect the wider corporate parenting agenda across the council;
- Establish clear lines of accountability for the Corporate Parenting Board:
 - The Executive Member for Education, Children and Young People and Skills holds the Corporate Parenting Board to account for its effectiveness;

- That the Executive receives periodic reports from the Corporate Parenting Board;
- Where potentially serious or highly significant issues are identified, these are referred direct to Council.
- Explore the option of appointing an independent advisor to the Corporate Parenting Board to support members in their ‘challenge’ role;
 - Establish and agree what is expected of elected members in being effective political corporate parents and in championing the needs of and outcomes for children in our care;
 - Confirm with elected members that they are adequately supported to undertake the role;

Corporate Priorities

6. This section should explain how the proposals relate to the Council’s corporate priorities (as set out in the Council’s Corporate Strategy) and other key change programmes (see ‘Corporate Priorities’ information sheet stored in library on CMS).

Ensuring safe and effective care arrangements for Looked After Children is both a Corporate Priority and a Statutory Duty

Implications

7. The report must demonstrate that all relevant implications of the proposals have been considered. **All** the following sub-headings should be included. Where a sub-heading is not relevant, this should be indicated by a brief sentence under the title; e.g. “There are no legal implications”. Report authors are advised to contact the relevant Head of Department at an early stage if their report is likely to have significant implications under any of these sub-headings.

- **Financial**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this paper. However, if the proposal for an independent specialist advisor to

a newly configured Corporate Parenting Board [CPB] is agreed there may be a small cost associated with the provision of such advice.

- **Human Resources (HR)**

There are no implications

- **Equalities**

There are no implications. However, the provision of specialist independent advice to a newly configured CPB could enhance the Board's ability to understand and challenge the looked after offer to children from protected groups.

- **Legal**

There are no implications

- **Crime and Disorder**

There are no implications

- **Information Technology (IT)**

There are no implications

- **Property**

There are no implications

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Report **Date** 29/09/15
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Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the authors of the report

End Note

The proposals set out above will be tabled for discussion with Group Leaders on 1 October, will be included along with recommendations on the forward plan for the Executive in October / November and will head to Full Council in December. Subject to endorsement and approval, new terms of reference will be developed for consideration at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board scheduled in January 2016.